



THE THRAMAS CRUSADE

"The fires of Horus' war would bring death to every corner of the Imperium. All that would distinguish one sector from another in the eyes of history was how they chose to face their end, be they Loyalist or Traitor. For the hero could die but once, while the coward dies anew with each retelling of their infamy."

Aleks Niebuhr, Imperial Historiographer, 073.M31

"No. Give my answer to your master when you see him in hell!"

Mayvin Khelen, Last Regent of Thramas, to the Night Lords' emissary at his request for their surrender, 007.M31

TO RULE AMONG THE ASHES OF EMPIRE

By the year 007.M31, the great rebellion of Horus Lupercal had spread to engulf much of the core sectors of the young Imperium, drowning the golden dreams of empire and dominion in the blood of martyrs. All across the northern reaches of the Imperium flew the banner of the Eye of Horus, the badge of the Traitor and, upon those strongholds held by the Loyalists, the Warmaster's fist had already descended, leaving Ultramar in ruins and scattering the hosts of the Emperor. Yet, thanks to the efforts of those brave warriors who remained true to their oaths of loyalty, Terra stood aware of its peril and Rogal Dorn had set those forces that remained to him to

hold the road to the Imperial throne. Horus stood checked, with no swift path but only a long war of attrition against the Seneschal of Terra, a war that would require resources and bodies were it to succeed.

Here was the crux of history, for given sufficient resources and warriors, regardless of their fervour for the cause, there was no defence or stratagem that could bar the Warmaster from Terra. Thramas, which many have deemed a sideshow to the true battles of the Horus Heresy, to those gaudy massacres at Calth and Signus, would decide the course of the rebellion. Horus was no fool, he was well aware of the rapacious

appetite of war and how vital it would be to capture the resources of the eastern sectors, and the vast majority of an entire Legion and its support troops were committed to the fight. The Night Lords were set loose upon the worlds of Thramas, unrestrained by any notion of duty to the people they sought to enslave and freed from the dictates of the Emperor and His *Principia Bellicosa*, His rules of war, to enforce the will of the Warmaster as they pleased. Horus cared little for the fate of distant Thramas so long as its riches in men and materials flowed into his war chest. If the Night Hunter and his blood-soaked kin chose to rule through fear and the edge of



a skinning knife, it was of no consequence when weighed against even the smallest advantage in the fight to seize Terra and topple the Emperor from His throne.

Those forces that remained loyal to the Emperor were ill-placed to oppose the conquest of Thramas and the jewel of the sector – the trio of Forge Worlds at Triplex – for the loyal Legions were either scattered and broken or penned within the borders of Ultramar and other small bastions of resistance. It was the midnight of the Imperium, the darkest point of this newly looming Dark Age. Yet, as with all nights, the dawn was inexorably approaching

– for, unknown to those who fought so desperately on both sides, word of the rebellion and the betrayal of the Imperium had spread far further than any might have thought and set loose another terror.

What approached the Imperium was no simple band of killers, for the Night Lords even with the gene-blessings of their Legiones Astartes heritage had become little more than that. No fractured remnant of a Legion all but beaten by the treachery of Horus, but a full army of the Legiones Astartes in all its furious glory come to exact a toll for the betrayal of the vows once sworn by the Warmaster and his conspirators.

If Thramas held, its defenders would behold the turning of the tide, the beginning of the war and the end of the rout that was the Horus Heresy. Once they had been first, greatest and most feared, but now they came last to the battlefield, diverted by the wiles of Horus and enraged by the betrayal of their kin.

The Lion made haste to properly greet his wayward brothers, and he who followed at his heels was Death.





Hale

Tsagualsa

Kruun

003

Gulgorahd

Taur

031

012

019

048

143

Dominion of Storms

Gargour

Kero-val

Heracles Nebula

Modrak

Memfok

Mortain

Aegis Sector

Heraldor

Verstun



Sector

The Aether Reef

Ulan Hûda

Tohruk

Wrack

Qetesh

Nergante

Sedricce

Thramas

Sérk

ate

Thramas Sector

Parthiac

Chenro

Yrrdek

Makator

Kenrac

Crucible

Crucible
Exclusion Zone

Yaelis

Sheol

Triplex Sector

Triplex

Galactic Xim

++ THE EASTERN FRINGE ++

++Circa 010.M31/Aegis/Triplex
/Gulgorahd/Thramas++



DUSK'S BLEAK SHADOW

*'No great good has ever been accomplished by the hand of Mankind, save where driven by dire necessity.
In this dark age of madness and war I am become that necessity, the bleak terror that shall drive this Imperium forcefully onto
the path of righteousness.'*

Inscription carved into the Night Haunter's sanctum walls aboard the Nightfall



To Shake the Pillars of Heaven

The war for the Eastern Fringe is often termed the Thramas Crusade by historiographers and scholars, a title that, while dramatic, serves only to trivialise what was a far more widespread conflict. The campaign Horus began when he unleashed the Night Lords would encompass most of the Eastern Fringe before its end, with major battles fought in four fully incorporated and warranted sectors of the Emperor's new Imperium and spilling out across the border territories at the very edge of the galaxy where the stars grew dim and distant. This was not to be a conflict limited to a single world or battlefield and fought by a single army, but a true crusade waged by millions upon millions of warriors across dozens of worlds that would leave a trail of death and destruction far worse than any of the famous massacres of the opening years of the Horus Heresy. Given free rein by the Warmaster and the fugue of nightmares and insanity that plagued the Night Haunter, the Night Lords would carve a bloody ruin across the stars of the Eastern Fringe, leaving few of its worlds unmarked by their rampage. It would be a legacy of terror that would linger in those benighted regions for millennia to come, far longer than the distant rumours of the destruction unleashed at Isstvan and later at Terra itself.

However, this was no unfocused war of annihilation, a campaign fought purely to revel in the slaughter it caused; rather, it had several fixed goals. Chief among these was the capture and domination of the three forges of Triplex. These three closely

linked Forge Worlds: Galatia, Phall and Thule, produced a wealth of munitions and engines of war, enough to overwhelm the cordon Rogal Dorn had placed around Terra and swamp the planet with sheer numbers. Secondary, stood the capture of Thramas and the heavily-populated worlds that surrounded it, which would provide the Warmaster with a vast reserve of soldiers to sacrifice upon the altar of war. Armed with the output of Triplex and other Traitor Forge Worlds, the forcibly-recruited populations of these worlds would serve as the chaff Horus would require for his great rebellion. Those remaining worlds, the minor forges and small colonies that abounded at the edge of known space, served as little more than minor prizes and offerings to the bloodthirsty nature of the Night Lords.

This was to be a war unlike those seen before in the opening years of the Horus Heresy, a war that would shake the foundations of the Imperium. It had become more than a simple rebellion, more than a brief battle for the throne where the armies of the Great Crusade tore each other apart, but a confrontation in which the very fabric of human civilisation was rent asunder. Not only would brother be pitted against brother, but the warriors once lauded as the saviours of Mankind would turn upon that which they had created. The dream of a golden empire would die, murdered by those that had once sworn their lives to its creation. With its death would be sealed the fate of our Imperium – doomed to a slow and lingering

demise. This would be the true legacy of the Thramas Crusade, a legacy written in the burned-out husks of once flourishing colonies and the broken remnants of proud Forge Worlds all across the border territories of the Imperium.

The Price of Defiance

It would begin quietly, almost unnoticed in the panic and uncertainty that swept the galaxy in the wake of the Isstvan atrocities. The Night Lords returned to their old places of power, to the ruins of Nostramo and the sprawling hive cities of Cairn and Kruun, replete with the plunder of Isstvan and hungry to claim a place of glory within Horus' new order. These worlds had long suffered under the stewardship of the Night Lords, the strict laws of the Night Haunter corrupted into a harsh system of honour killings and bribery by time and the degradation of his Legion. Having long since learned the terrible price of defiance, they offered up their sons and daughters to serve the Warmaster without hesitation, not out of loyalty but for fear of the punishment that any refusal would draw down upon them. But these were the last dregs of systems long since bled dry. In short order, the Night Lords turned towards Thramas, having replenished the ranks of their thralls and the munitions holds of their fleets with the lifeblood of the Nostramo sector, casting off the husk of Nostramo and the exhausted dominion once given into their care by the Emperor that they might claim a realm more fitting of their new station at the Warmaster's side.

The Madness of Konrad Curze

History has often seen the Night Haunter as the most obvious example of evil within the ranks of the Traitor Primarchs. After all, both his bloody proclivities and penchant for torture were well known among his brothers. Worse still was the matter of the brutal destruction of his home world of Nostramo, subsequent incarceration on Terra and assault on his brother Rogal Dorn, which had not yet become common knowledge in the last few years of the Great Crusade. Yet, this is but a small part of the tragedy of Konrad Curze, whose burden was to have been too much the son of his father.

Like several of his brothers, Curze had inherited a fragment of the Emperor's foresight, a tiny shard of His vision and flawed in its purpose. For where the Emperor could see all the many futures and chart a course through them, Curze saw only a single strand of the whole, a dark path of failure and death that would sour his mind and cloud his purpose. No matter his successes or achievements, no matter how far he rose from the ignominy and horror of his childhood on the foul streets of old Nostramo, his visions would never change, always showing him the same dark fate. It slowly drove him towards madness.

By the last years of the Great Crusade, he stood on the very edge of sanity and none can know his true reasons for joining Horus' rebellion. Was it a desire to make one final attempt to break free of the fate he saw for himself and the Imperium, or a simple need to wash away the visions with blood and death? All that is certain is that when he went to war in Thramas, he was but a shadow of the warrior and general he had once been. The purpose he had torn from the ruin of Nostramo overwhelmed by despair and anger, and his soul left empty. Even as the father of the VIIIth Legion searched for a new purpose, so too did his sons, now bereft of any guidance but their own bloody natures and terrible pasts. Some yet remembered the days of the Great Crusade when they had stood as a Legion, an army of brothers, and sought to build a better realm than that which had spawned them, while others sought only the red release of death and slaughter, an empire of corpses and blood. With Curze lost to dark dreams and old obsessions, it would be his sons who charted the course of the Legion, some seeking to restore their lord to his former dark splendour and others to plunge him into madness forever. The war for Thramas and the worlds of the east would also be the war for the soul of a Legion and the destiny of a Primarch.

Thramas and its environs, situated but a short span of travel from the Nostramo sector, were no strangers to the Night Lords. The chain of inhabited worlds that linked the two sectors was known as the Tithe Road, or the Path of Tears, for along this route the Night Lords had long made annual pilgrimages to claim the toll for their protection and patronage, taking for their own those that survived their brutal trials of initiation. Ever the first stop upon this Tithe Road, Tsagualsa had endured the demands of the Night Lords for almost a century, giving up the finest of its meagre population to serve the whims of Konrad Curze and, when the Night Lords returned in the last months of 007.M31, they were prepared to offer what they could to the warriors that had conquered the galaxy in the Emperor's name. Yet, this time the Night Lords did not come bearing the golden seal of the Emperor but the grim terms of Horus' infamous Dark Compliance. Of Tsagualsa they demanded every citizen that could bear arms or serve as thrall for the VIIIth Legion, and laid claim to those few resources possessed by that small and insignificant world. They asked for the death of Tsagualsa to slake the

hunger of war and sustain the Night Lords, and offered only a short lifetime of blood and toil in exchange. The hardy border settlers of Tsagualsa balked at the surrender of their lives, families and homes for the glory of a renegade Warmaster and a distant battle for a planet they had never beheld, but with little more than a few regiments of militia to defend themselves, they could only beg the Night Lords to relent.

With casual indifference, the Night Lords fell upon Tsagualsa in the wake of their refusal of the Warmaster's terms, as eager to use the world as an object example as they were to accept its loyalty and small wealth. Tsagualsa burned; its few defenders slaughtered in a confrontation that could not be called a battle, for it was little more than a slaughter as the Night Lords crushed those who dared resist them with contemptuous ease and set about the grim practices for which they had become infamous. In a single night of blood and death, the population of Tsagualsa were herded into the flaying pits of Curze's sons and shown the price of defiance, with a few hundred allowed to escape on ancient and decrepit void ships

that they might spread the word of the Night Lords' approach and the terrible toll they would exact on those who chose to oppose them. Upon the ruins of Tsagualsa's broken cities, the Night Lords set the foundations of a new citadel to replace their lost holdings on Nostramo, a statement to the worlds of the Eastern Fringe that the Night Lords had not come merely as raiders or messengers but as conquerors and overlords. Tsagualsa would be but the beginning of this campaign of terror, with individual bands of Night Lords – often little more than a lone cruiser and a few companies of the VIIIth Legion – spreading throughout the isolated worlds along the Path of Tears and offering each world the same brutal choice: surrender themselves utterly to the will of the Night Lords and the Warmaster or watch their homes burn and people die. Within the space of a few short months, the borders of the adjoining Thramas sector and Gulgorahd Protectorate were thronging with overburdened refugee ships and dire tales of bloodshed and death.

Such atrocities were a common feature of the cruel style of war prosecuted by the Night Lords, a stratagem that the Legion had originally pursued with a cold logic, seeking to sap the will of the foe by fear and terror, but which many within the Legion now cleaved to with a savage joy for slaughter and death, regardless of whether it granted them any military advantage. Indeed, the Legion had long suffered from a slow decline in the character of its recruits, with the dregs of Nostramo and the surrounding squalid worlds coming to dominate many of its ranks. What had once been an army dedicated to the unfeeling application of justice and retribution had slowly become more akin to an unruly mob; the once strict order of the Legion becoming a loose association of warbands and gangs. Even its Primarch, Konrad Curze, had fallen into a strange malaise, foregoing more and more of his duties to his Legion to indulge bloody whims and morbid impulses while allowing the various warlords among the Night Lords to gather more power unto themselves. He grew more distant and morose with each passing day, haunted by visions of a future he refused to reveal to even the most trusted of his sons and a fate that stole from him any emotion other than hateful spite. By the early stages of the Legion's encroachment into the Thramas sector, the Night Lords were split between two informal factions: those few that still remembered the Legion that once was and strove to preserve it and its master, and those who sought only to indulge their bloodthirsty nature without the interference of the Night Haunter.

It was this latter faction that took the lead as the Night Lords stood on the borders of the Thramas sector, burning and killing for the simple pleasure of it. Chief among these warriors was the Nostraman Nakrid Thole, an outspoken critic of his Primarch and a charismatic warlord who had garnered a large following among the newer recruits. His warriors led the reaving of the Path of Tears and made a reality of its name, before turning their avaricious gaze upon the richer pickings of the Thramas sector. These worlds were the Imperium's final border with the unknown and were defended by the Thramassi Nightwatch regiments of the Solar Auxilia, men and women who had long fought to hold their homes safe far from the busy heart of the Imperium. Yet, the tales of woe brought by those refugees that fled to the safety of the throne world of Thramas told of the fate of those who resisted and, with the world of Thramas itself silent in the face of Horus' declaration of dominion over the Imperium, few among the people of that distant frontier wished to provoke the ire of Horus' bloody emissaries. Many of the border worlds fell to hysteria long before

the arrival of the Night Lords, the warriors of Thramas now unwelcome on the worlds they had sworn to protect, judged a force just large enough to warrant destruction but not powerful enough to stand against the Night Lords' raiding companies alone. Rather than bring destruction down upon the people of the border marches, many Nightwatch regiments abandoned their bases and took to ships bound for Thramas, leaving behind nothing of use for the Night Lords and entrusting the fate of the worlds they had once stood sentinel over to the planetary militia and governors. A few accepted the mandate of the Warmaster and turned their coats in allegiance to him, deeming the mantle of rebel preferable to the bitter pride of the martyr, while others secreted their wargear in hidden caches and took refuge in plain sight among the populace, hoping to wait out this savage storm. Within the space of a few months, the Night Lords were the uncontested masters of nearly half the Thramas sector, from Tsagualsa to the galactic north to the key crossroads world of Crucible on the very doorstep of Thramas itself.

Here, Nakrid Thole and those that followed him paused to indulge once more in their bloody obsession, making gruesome examples of even the slightest sign of resistance and taking a terrible delight in the slow annihilation of those that offered open defiance. The wide plaza of Serk, once filled with statues dedicated to the heroes of the Great Crusade, was rendered into a gore-spattered charnel house when the governor refused to deface the monuments to those Legions that had remained loyal to the Emperor. Nakrid Thole himself draped the governor's flayed skin atop the statue of Dorn after a short and one-sided battle to take the many-spired palace of Serk, the planetary militia no match for his Night Lords. The Night Hunter himself took to the hive domes of Makator V, seeking to exact a tithe in blood for the wealth its merchants had long flaunted. It was a crude and debased re-enactment of his youth on Nostramo, a bloody release of the visions that tormented him, but one that could not dispel the malaise that drove him towards madness and despair.



The Keystone of Victory

Even as the most bloodthirsty of the Night Haunter's sons urged their master to ever greater feats of carnage, those who still remembered their duty drove on to the Triplex sector. This was the key to Horus' plans for the Eastern Fringe, the vast manufactoria and skilled forge wrights of the Triplex system more than capable of creating an army fit for the Warmaster's goals. With three full Forge Worlds to be found within the Triplex system, it boasted a force of arms more than capable of fending off an assault by anything less than the full VIIIth Legion, and even then such a battle would likely leave the valuable industrial infrastructure in broken ruin. Led by the lord of the Atramentar, Sevatar, and others of the Night Haunter's most veteran commanders, many of whom had origins on distant Terra, the Night Lords numbered four full Chapters, a force at once both too grand for simple raids and insufficient for a full scale assault. Breaching real space, the Night Lords' flotilla entered Triplex in full battle array, prepared for anything that might await them, except perhaps what they were to find.

Triplex did not stand ready to prosecute a war, but was instead amidst the work of recovery in the aftermath of one all but concluded. Triplex Thule, the smallest of the three forges of the system and long the

most ardent in its support of the Emperor and His works, had been subjugated by its cousins in a short and bitter conflict. The system was littered with the signs of it; the hulks of broken starships and the corpses of fallen Titans on the plains of Thule, and above all the fortresses of the Mechanicum, the Eye of Horus flew alongside the banners of the Opus Machina. All that remained was the destruction of the last holdout bastions of the Thule Magi, a task to which the Night Lords took with relish, eager to cement their alliance with those of Triplex's rulers that sought to align themselves with the Traitors.

The final battle of the Triplex subjugation was fought on the outermost world of the system, barren Nehren. Here, the final fortress of the Magi of Thule was set deep into the frozen rock, guarded from above by the last few maniples of the Legio Victorum III, the Foe Breakers, as well as several batteries of orbital defence cannon and from within by the remains of the automata and thralls of that fallen forge. Until now, the defence cannon had kept the Traitor Mechanicum fleet at bay, the vast landers of the Legio Victorum I and II reluctant to risk their precious cargo in the face of the bombardment from the surface, but the arrival of the Night Lords broke the stalemate asunder. The Terminators of the Atramentar, with Sevatar at their head, risked a teleport assault into the

heart of the underground fortress to strike at the cannon's reactors. With the majority of the defenders mustered at the gateways and entrances, the Night Lords faced but scant resistance and swiftly captured and deactivated the great cannon.

With this last defence stripped away, the Titans of the Traitor Legio Victorum began the annihilation of their former brethren. On the surface of Nehren, the Foe Breakers, loyal to their last breath, advanced against five times their number, determined to exact a worthy toll for their extinction. Even as giants duelled to the death above, the Night Lords pressed deeper into the fortress to challenge the Archmagos of Thule. Sevatar himself defeated the automata sentinels that guarded the Archmagos and made a captive of him, a martial triumph for which he refused any reward, seemingly bemused by the offer. With Triplex now firmly in the hands of the Traitor archmagi of Galatia and Phall, they acceded to an alliance with the Warmaster and the Night Lords, offering the service of their armies and the labour of their manufactoria so that they might share in the glory of his victory over Mars and the Emperor.

Unsated by the slaughter in which he had indulged, Konrad Curze would arrive late to the victory in Triplex, having left the prosecution of Thramas' capture to Nakrid Thole. He had followed along the trail of his loyal sons, drawn to the death and destruction that had been wrought in Triplex. Just as his favoured son Sevatar had refused the largesse of the archmagi, so too did Curze shun their petty praise and flattery as they sought to ingratiate themselves with the Warmaster's representative. Instead, he took the captive Archmagos of Thule as a living trophy, plying the grim trade of torture upon the helpless potentate in the solitude of his sanctum aboard *Nightfall*, the flagship of his fleet. Despite the foundations of a new fortress for the Night Lords being laid on the distant world of Tsagualsa, it would be Triplex that played host to the Night Haunter and the core of his Legion for much of the campaign, though the Primarch himself was most often to be found sealed within his hidden sanctum, the reins of leadership left to the individual warlords of the VIIIth Legion. Despite this, it seemed that the Traitors had firmly seized the upper hand in the conflict, with no open opposition to their assault save for scattered massacres and short-lived rebellions.

The Hidden War

Triplex, though seen as unified by outsiders, had long been riven by dissent. Triplex Phall had grown strong off of the spoils of the Great Crusade, to which it had gifted the use of its fragment of the Legio Victorum at the behest of Horus Lupercal, and had outstripped its brother forges in terms of both power and influence. Triplex Galatia was content to sit at the right hand of its sibling, to receive in turn the rewards of the newly-crowned Warmaster and the resources of distant worlds captured by his armies, but Triplex Thule held little interest in third-hand glories and the cast-off bounty of its kin. Instead, even in the days before the Great Crusade crumbled into ruin, it waged a quiet war with its brother, seeking to suborn the loyalty of those worlds about Triplex while the warriors and magi of Phall travelled in distant systems and set shadow agents within its networks to corrupt and slow its works.

With time such efforts might have borne fruit, might have turned the tide of destiny to their favour and set Phall on the path to decline, but time is an asset that even the esoteric arts of the Tech-Priests cannot fully control. When Horus loosed the bonds of loyalty from those that saw themselves as his servants, first and foremost he granted Phall an opportunity that had long been denied them by the laws of the Emperor and Mars. They unleashed the full power of their armies on Thule and the few allies they had won to their side, armies whose deadly skills had been honed on a thousand battlefields across the stars. Shadows and subterfuge availed the magi of Thule little, those they had thought to call allies deserted them in the face of utter defeat and Galatia turned its face from the slaughter of its brother forge. As Horus had taught them during the Great Crusade, the magi of Phall made plain their right to rule over Triplex by force of arms.

Surrender is Death

Nakrid Thole, though no veteran of the centuries-long Great Crusade, knew well the worth of terror and how to best wield it. It was a lesson carved into the souls of the sons of Curze's Nostramo, a world that had been destroyed by the harsh laws and keen punishments of the Night Hunter. He and the other praetors and warlords of the malcontent faction of the Legion had sown the seeds of fear across the weakest sub-sectors of Thramassi space and now were set to reap the fruits of their labour, moving to seize the last keystones of the Eastern Fringe, the lesser Forge World of Gulgorahd and the hive world of Thramas, jewel of the border marches.

In their hubris, the warlords allied to Thole judged that those worlds that remained would offer no real resistance, cowed by fear and burdened by the throngs of refugees driven to them by the campaign of terror that had been wrought upon the border marches, and dispatched but token forces to take control of them. For with the Night Hunter diminished by the curse of foresight and secluded in Triplex, there was no force to unify the Night Lords and bind them to a goal other than simple butchery, none to keep them from dissolution and madness. Each of the warlords that had chosen not to follow Curze to Triplex chose a path for themselves, without care for the plans of Horus or their brothers, seeking only to sate the bloody urges of their followers and to seize a territory of their own.

A loose alliance of several Chapters moved on the closed borders of the Gulgorahd Protectorate, expecting the swift surrender of the lesser forge, just as the greater power of Triplex had bent the knee to the Night Hunter, while Thole claimed the honour of accepting Thramas' surrender for himself

The Sheol Incident

Of all the records of this time, it is the fighting on Sheol III that best captures the madness that threatened to overwhelm the Night Lords. A modest hive world, only recently having reached its full growth, Sheol III was a rich prize for any warband that laid claim to it, its people were hardy and well-suited as recruiting stock and its factories operating at peak efficiency – but it was not one Night Lords warlord that came to Sheol, but two. The Dark Eyes and the Boneless were both new Chapters – constituted almost entirely from the last intake of Nostraman recruits and still understrength and lacking in heavy armour – both hungry for their share of the spoils of war. Meeting in the bowels of the hive, a setting comforting to the warriors of both camps, the two praetors attempted to settle the matter of who would reap the riches of Sheol, but only one would return alive having silenced his rival in the manner traditional to Nostraman gangers. Within days, the hives of Sheol played host neither to an invasion, nor even to a bloody purge but to a conflict so brutal it could not even be termed a civil war. The two Chapters of the Night Lords tore into each other with a violence more akin to animals than men, the Dark Eyes leaving only a tattered remnant of the Boneless, shattered and broken, to change their colours and join the victorious Dark Eyes. Without a lord to guide them or even an outside enemy to focus them, the Night Lords had turned upon themselves without a second thought; it was perhaps a vision of what was to come once Horus had won his war.

alone. With a force amounting to little more than a single Chapter of his kin and a squadron of three cruisers he translated into the Thramas system, his arrival delayed by a thirst for destruction that saw his fleet stop at a number of smaller worlds along their course. The Thramas system was unlike any of the lesser border worlds, for it served as a major way-station for those detachments of

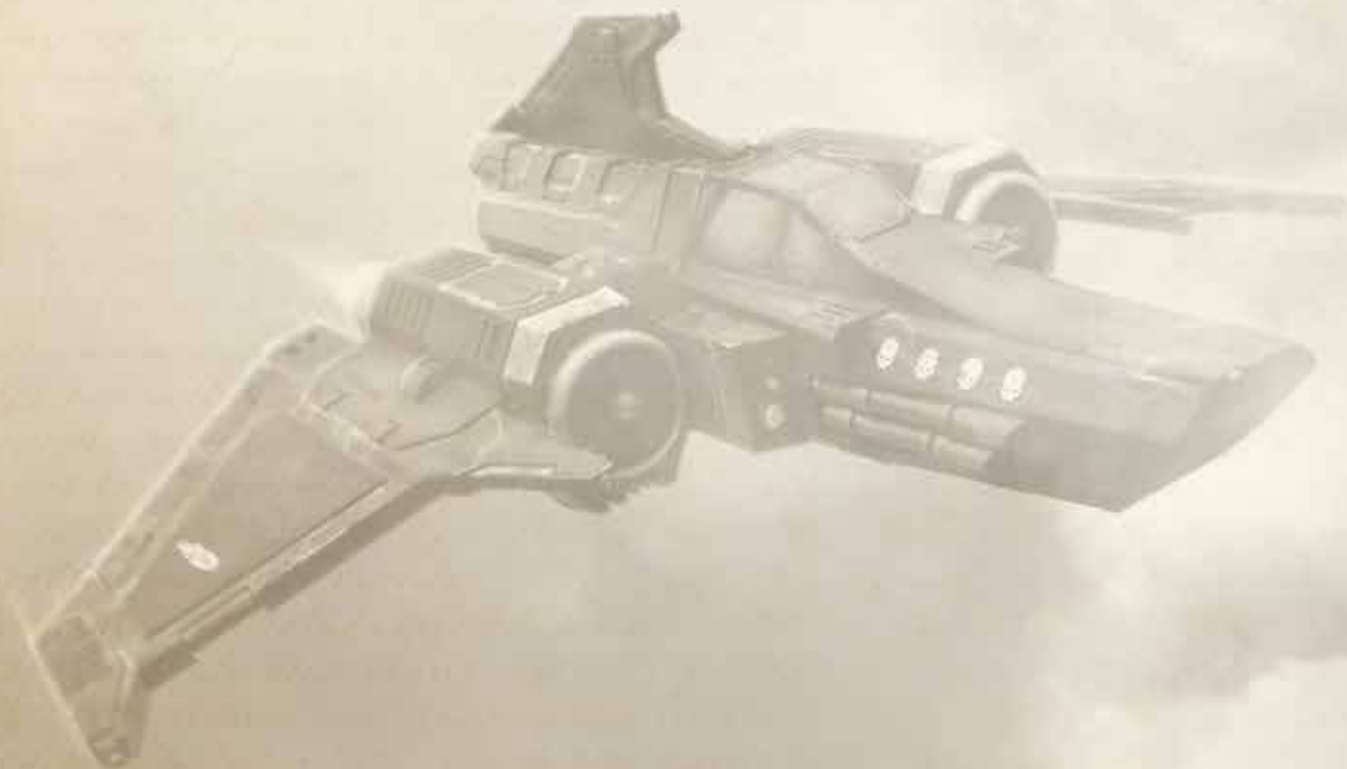
the Great Crusade that were headed for the eastern gulf, the dark space at the edge of the galaxy and, as such, boasted a constellation of planetary defences powerful enough to stand off any conventional fleet, as well as several small Expeditionary fleets which were awaiting orders at the orbital dry-docks and mustering stations at the zenith and nadir points of the local system.



On the surface its defences were just as formidable, its vast hives more akin to fortresses than cities, enveloped in tiers of ferrocrete fortifications and crackling void shields, and defended by a host of regiments of the Imperial Army, both the Thramassi Nightwatch and those units intended for the Great Crusade but now trapped on Thramas. It was a veritable planetary citadel intended to stand off any incursion by xenos invaders or horrors from the outer void, but equally capable of keeping Thole's small fleet at bay were it pitted against them in open battle – but, as Thole and his ships approached, the guns lay cold and the warriors of the Great Crusade sat idle in their barracks.

Thramas, though armoured and buttressed against bomb and shell, had been laid low by a far more insidious weapon. Fear had taken hold of its people and the senate of Thramas; the hordes of broken refugees had sown their seeds of despair, with each successive wave bringing new tales of woe and word of more worlds ruined for the sin of resistance. Terra was silent and word of the massacre of the Loyalist Legions at Isstvan had been widely spread by Horus' agents. Thramas believed it stood alone against a storm that they could not hope to withstand. The Regent of Thramas,

Mayvin Khelen, weighed the worth of loyalty and defiance against the value of her citizen's lives, for should Thramas rise in defence of the Imperium and the Emperor's dream of unity, it would pay with the blood of each of its sons and daughters. As the Night Lords cruisers loomed in orbit, it seemed to all those present that Thramas would fall without firing a shot and the wealth of the Eastern Fringe would be claimed by Horus. Nakrid Thole and his honour guard stepped from their transports into a city consumed by despair, its streets crowded with the warriors of the Nightwatch,



gathered from across the sector by the advance of the Traitors, angry and impotent in the face of the Night Lords' hegemony of the sector. Without allies they could do nothing but perish, any desire to avenge the atrocities committed by the sons of Curze tempered by the knowledge that it would cost those they had sworn to protect their very lives. Nakrid Thole wore the cloak of his victory with an arrogance that sparked the hatred of all that observed his slow approach to the palace, and with gauntlets still stained a dull brown with the blood of innocents and loyal servants of

the Emperor, he took hold of the great brass gates of the Regent's palace and threw them open to receive his due.

Then, a single battered frigate, its hull fractured by weapons fire and lit by the dreadful flare of internal fires, breached realspace and blasted a high-gain vox transmission bearing the seal of the lesser forge of Gulgorahd across the Thramas system:

"War is a simple equation; its solution is victory or death.

Those who cannot triumph are ground to dust by the gears of history, for only in victory can there be found life. No matter the strength of the foe, to resist even in the face of annihilation is the only logical course of action. Surrender is but a slower resolution of the equation, a lingering and painful end to the struggle.

Gulgorahd will never surrender.

Surrender is death".



The Logic of Hate

Gulgorahd is a name spoken little in the great tomes of history. A minor Forge World on the edge of Imperium space, it had weathered the Long Night with a single-minded determination and brutal resilience, sacrificing what it must and fighting where it could. When the Imperium's fleets returned order to the Eastern Fringe, linked the scattered colonies and settled new worlds, Gulgorahd hoped for a resurgence of glory only to find that both the Imperium and Mars favoured mighty Triplex over battered Gulgorahd. Triplex, situated further from the turbulent warp storms of the so-called Ghouls Stars, had faced far less hardship while Gulgorahd stood strong against the xenos hordes that dwelt within, it was the bravery of Gulgorahd that had birthed the wealth of Triplex. This insult spawned a one-sided rivalry that would last a century – Triplex never deigning to notice the lesser Gulgorahd as it slowly dwindled into obscurity.

When the Night Lords arrived at the borders of Gulgorahd's barren territories, so sure of the strength of their fleets and the power of their new allies, they assumed that the magi of Gulgorahd would surrender in the face of insurmountable odds. They assumed that with Triplex now aligned with Horus, the practical-minded servants of the Mechanicum would follow suit. It was a fatal mistake. The Night Lords underestimated the true strength hidden below the rusted exterior of Gulgorahd's holdings, failed to note the strength of its bastion worlds and its utter, all-consuming hatred of Triplex. As the Night Lords sat in orbit of Bastion-019, the outermost of its fortress worlds, awaiting the answer they knew must come from the planet below, which had lain silent and sleeping since the end of Old Night, it woke once more. Automata armies shuddered to life and mustered in the subterranean halls, thralls more machine than man mounted their Knights and readied themselves for war, and cannon that had not spoken in anger for almost a century roared again. The Night Lords cruiser *Callow Flame* erupted in explosions, the answer of the lords of Gulgorahd to Horus: they cared not for the Emperor, but those who took Triplex as friends were ever the foes of Gulgorahd.

Nightfall

The ponderous gates of the Regent's palace on Thramas opened on a scene that Thole had not expected, the vast throne room was packed with the members of the Thramassi senate and with the warriors of the Nightwatch, but something had changed. No longer did fear hang heavy in the air, no longer did the veterans of the Solar Auxilia bow their heads and cower in the face of the Night Lords, but instead glared their hatred with a new determination. Yet, Thole was of the Legiones Astartes, the hatred of mortal warriors was nothing to him and victory more cherished than life. He advanced down the long hallway, its walls lined with the banners of the Great Crusade's victories and the proud history of Thramas as a stronghold of the Emperor and His dream of unity, past the warriors that had carved an empire at the edge of the galaxy alongside those heroes that now lay dead in the dust of distant Istvan V, and gave a mocking bow before the Regent's throne. There, in the heart of his enemy's domain, he knew no fear, only a certainty in his own success and the power of the fear he had sown across the stars of the Eastern Fringe, and demanded the unconditional surrender of Thramas and all its domains, in the name of the Warmaster,

Konrad Curze and the Night Lords. In return Mayvin Khelen, last Regent of Thramas, spoke a single word: "No".

At her side, Arcturus Morhde, Captain-general of the Nightwatch regiments and a Terran veteran of the Great Crusade, drew the archaeotech pistol once presented to him by the courts of Terra as reward for his loyalty and emptied its magazine into Thole's dumbfounded face. Around him the elite of the Nightwatch, the Midnight Host, activated their power axes and charged into the ranks of the Night Lords honour guard, which met them with roaring chainglaives. The throne room erupted into a chaos of flashing blades and gunfire, the Night Lords carving a path out of the palace, the crippled body of their lord carried amongst them, while the city took up arms in the name of the Emperor. All across the planet and on the stations in orbit, regiments scrambled to full battle readiness, some called to arms by defiant vox broadcasts from the palace, others by the orders of their own officers and some by simple instinct as the city descended into chaos. Those regiments that had shown loyalty to the Warmaster or argued for surrender to the Night Lords suddenly found themselves attacked by the loyal Nightwatch or Great Crusade units whose loyalty was to the

Emperor, and mobs of citizens and vengeful refugees took up arms to seek revenge for the months of torment inflicted by the Night Lords. The small detachment of Night Lords Thole had left at the space port to secure their transports was overwhelmed by the onslaught of the Antikaan Hussars, whose banners bore the mark of the Imperial Fists whom they had long fought alongside, while other bands of Night Lords escaping from the palace were hunted and harried through the city by the light armour of the Midnight Host. Death stalked the city for the entirety of the long Thramassi night, with running battles and desperate sieges playing out all across the world in the wake of the Regent's sudden declaration of war.

In orbit, the surviving Night Lords of Thole's Terminator bodyguard and the horribly-wounded praetor himself had barely reached the safety of their cruiser, having captured a Thramassi shuttle from the palace's spire-top landing bays, when the macro-cannon and defence lasers on the planet below opened fire. Searing beams of energy and immense explosions turned the night sky of Thramas as bright as noon, the cruisers' shields flaring and buckling under the sustained barrage with little power to spare for any counter-assault. In the orbital stations around the embattled Night Lords ships, the various craft of the Great Crusade fleets at anchor woke to the sudden eruption of conflict, many having been sat at battle stations since the arrival of the Night Lords in the system. Some, such as the *Crimson Tyrant*, an ancient Visigoth class battle cruiser that had fought many times at the behest of Horus Lupercal, battered clear of docking restraints fixed by the Thramassi officers and blasted a path to the aid of the Night Lords. Others found themselves boarded at anchor by the warriors of the Nightwatch and taken as prizes by the Loyalist cause, their command crews executed and ratings forced into the service of the Regent and the Emperor. Most took up the cause of Thramas when the guns began to sound and advanced upon the small Traitor flotilla that hung in the sky above that embattled world, a wedge of vengeful ships more than enough to overwhelm the Night Lords and their allies.

With the pragmatism for which they were renowned, the Night Lords made no attempt to contest control of orbit, instead launching a spiteful volley of phage warheads at the planet and then abandoning their erstwhile allies in order to flee the system. However, their escape could not stop what was coming, word spread out from Thramas and

across the sector, borne by raiding frigates and Nightwatch battle squadrons; no longer would the loyal people of the Eastern Fringe stand idly by while Horus plundered their homes and enslaved their neighbours – now there would be war no matter the cost. The scattered warbands of the Night Lords dissidents, still each intent on their own private slaughter, found themselves hard pressed by sudden rebellions and unexpected assaults. Those soldiers of the Nightwatch that had gone into hiding became guerrillas and saboteurs, harrying the Night Lords' logistical bases and isolated garrisons, while the armies of Thramas and Gulgorahd went on the offensive on planets across the Thramas sector and beyond. Against any other foe, the counter-attack would have been overwhelming, but the Night Lords were no normal force, but a Legion of the finest warriors ever created. They returned the desperate assault of the Loyalists with a fury of their own and the sector fell into a nightmare of bloodshed and battle. On those worlds where the Night Lords were beset by insurgents, they slaughtered the populace indiscriminately to root out the warriors hidden among them, making bloody trophies of the slain and decorating the flanks of their war engines with the skins of those they captured. Where the enemy dared to make open war against them, they took to the cities to fight their battles, forcing the warriors of Thramas to bomb those they sought to save or face the Night Lords in the twisted steel canyons of hive and manufactoria where the Nightwatch's superior numbers meant nothing in the face of the skill of the Legiones Astartes.

Total war gripped the sector, fought in every theatre of combat and with every weapon available. There was no longer such a thing as a noncombatant, only Loyalist or Traitor – ally or enemy. Those few worlds that avoided the fires of open battle were wracked by starvation as trade ceased across the quadrant, and disease stalked the worlds of the Eastern Fringe with impunity and abandon. Thramas and the armies of the Regent, despite their initial advantage, made little headway against

the superior skill of the Night Lords and soon found themselves bogged down in the desperate defence of those few worlds they had managed to secure. Qetesh Prime and Crucible were little more than charnel houses where the Night Lords committed an endless stream of slave-soldiers and thralls to weaken the Nightwatch's defences, while Thramas itself endured constant raids and spoiling attacks on the orders of the now hideously scarred and deranged Nakrid Thole. Gulgorahd, despite its fervour and bluster, was caught between the Night Lords and the Traitor worlds of the Aegis sector, barely able to hold the outer bastion worlds on the borders of its territory. Indeed, Bastion-019 endured such a ferocious assault that its surface was entirely scorched and irradiated, the thrall-Knights and automata legions taking refuge in a labyrinth of sub-surface tunnels and fortifications to continue their stubborn resistance.

The Loyalists could not defeat their foe, could not push the Night Lords from their homes, but nor could they be defeated without dealing a mortal blow to Horus' ambitions and crippling his plan to drain the Eastern Fringe of resources. The Thramas sector, and those territories adjoining it, stood on a knife edge but one slip away from annihilation. Yet they held the line and for a short, bittersweet moment of history, it seemed that they might be able to hold the foe in bloody stalemate till exhaustion sent him in search of less tenacious prey. Until the return of the Night Haunter that is, stirred from his dark and morbid dreams by the changing winds of fate and driven back into the eye of the storm.

Curze descended upon the worlds around Thramas like a thunderbolt, with the armies of Triplex at his back and the most loyal of his sons at his side, a concentration of force more than enough to break the stalemate that had taken hold of the Eastern Fringe.

Between the Titans of the Legio Victorum and the warriors of the Night Lords there were few defences to hold them back, and the first worlds in his path, the packed hives of Sheol III and Yaelis, fell within a week. Knowing full well the fate of those that fell into the hands of the Night Lords, the defenders of Sheol fought to the last, making no attempt to broker a surrender and instead mining the central hive spire around them with phosphex charges and detonating them once the final fortifications were breached. On Yaelis, so far largely intact despite having changed hands three times during the fighting, the ragged survivors of a dozen decimated Auxilia regiments fell back into the manufactoria in the hive's lower levels hoping the enemy would not dare engage them in a pitched battle, only to perish piecemeal as the Night Haunter himself descended to hunt them like animals as an example to others who might resist. Bastions 011 and 009 fell in some of the largest Titan battles of the entire Thramas Crusade, with the Traitor Legios Victorum I and II as well as the Legio Phasma, long bound to the Night Lords, engaging the bulk of Gulgorahd's Legio Adamantus and elements of the loyal Legios Atrox and Saevus. Near a hundred god-engines would fall in the course of a month's fighting, though the Legio Adamantus lived up to its cognomen, the Unbroken, with many maniples fighting to the last rather than retreating even in the face of overwhelming odds. It seemed that time had run out for the Loyalist cause, for now it was not a matter of if they would be defeated, but simply when. Night had fallen on the great dream of the Emperor, and it seemed that there was none that could avert its final and inexorable end.









DEATH'S SWIFT WINGS

'Though the brave face the onrushing storm without hesitation or reserve, it is the wise who seek shelter from its fury that survive to tell of that valour.'

Transliteration from an Ancient Terran text, known simply as the Analects

MIDNIGHT IN THE KINGDOM OF ASHES

Despair settled over the worlds of the Thramas sector and the Gulgorahd Protectorate like a dark shroud. Those warriors who fought against the Warmaster, whether they cared for the Loyalist cause or not, had come to accept that they lived now on borrowed time, that death had already claimed their souls and was merely forestalling collection. Yet, the enemy they faced now was no less than the Night Hunter himself, and the price he demanded for their surrender was not simply death but the slaughter and dismemberment of all those they held dear; for in their defiance they had unleashed the whirlwind and could not return it to its slumber. The war was no longer a simple matter of which distant figurehead would be named their sovereign, of which banner flew above their homes, but one of annihilation. For, consumed by his dark dreams, the Night Hunter had thrown aside Horus' desire to seize the Thramas sector intact and allowed his demons and the most debased of his sons to take the lead. Death would be the reward of the fortunate few, while an eternity of torment awaited the survivors.

This was the only truth left for Thramas, and the warriors that remained to defend its worlds fought like the damned themselves. Some sought a swift end, and on Kenrac the Imperialis Militia regiments chose to slaughter their own people rather than leave them to the mercy of the Night Lords, before mounting a suicidal assault into the Traitors' landing zones to seek an end of their own. On Crucible, a vital strategic crossroads to the heart of the Thramas sector, Captain-general Morhde of the Nightwatch commanded eight regiments of the Solar Auxilia in its defence, but soon found his forces reduced to a fraction of

their original size repelling the continuous raids of the Night Lords. With retreat not an option, the Captain-general armed the underhive gangs and conscripted every citizen capable of holding a weapon to fight, dispersing veterans of the Nightwatch among their ranks as overseers. On the far side of the warzone, Bastion-019 still held, having been besieged for almost six long months, the world now little more than an amalgamation of craters and blast scars where a few hundred surviving tech-thralls and a handful of Knights continued their resistance as nomadic companies in the labyrinth of sub-surface tunnels. Bastion-019 posed no real threat to the Traitor fleets anymore, but its stubborn refusal to accept defeat was an affront to the Night Lords' pride and they refused to bypass the world until the last defender was reduced to a trophy to adorn their war engines.

No longer did either side make any attempt to offer or seek terms, to negotiate or demand, the lines had been drawn and now only death could end things. Slowly but surely the Traitor forces, now superior in both number and skill, ground down and annihilated the defenders in a series of deliberately slow and drawn out battles. The Night Lords seemed to savour the utter destruction of both the defenders' bodies and their spirits, wasting much time and effort on demoralising raids and gruesome massacres, spurning more than one opportunity for quick conquest to indulge in carnage. Despite this, by the middle of 008.M31 it would appear that the Thramas Crusade was all but won.

Unexpected and Unlooked For

In all the long months of fighting, Triplex had not been idle, its vast manufactoria churned out a near endless stream of war machines and munitions, some sent straight into conflict and the greater portion set aside as tribute for the Warmaster. Entire cohorts of automata marched from the factories, the skeletons of new Titans were raised in the great halls of the forges of Phall and Galatia as the riches of Thramas poured into Triplex, wealth so vast that even the archmagi of the Mechanicum struggled to tabulate its worth. Ships flying the colours of the Warmaster, the baleful eye of Horus, thronged into the system to transport the newly-forged hordes to war in Thramas or far off to the frontlines of the Horus Heresy at Paramar and Beta-Garmon. With so many ships moving between the main forges and the various Mandeville points at the edge of the system, it is little wonder that the arrival of a new formation went unnoticed by the Mechanicum sentinel barges. These new arrivals were no bulk haulers or even the sleek and gruesomely adorned ships of the Night Lords, but a type of vessel all but extinct in the Imperium. These were relics of a forgotten age, ancient warships whose design dated back to the Golden Age of Mankind, garbed all in sable black and each bearing a single device: a winged sword.

Diamat Incursion

The Dark Angels had been dispatched by Horus to the distant Shield Worlds, an enclave of Mankind situated in the black between galaxies and bound in some fashion to a xenos breed unknown within our own realm. The war to subjugate this realm had kept the Lion absent from the Imperium while Horus made the first moves of his rebellion, but still rumours of unrest and tragedy would eventually reach him. His Legion fully engaged in the war with the Shield Worlds, the Lion could spare only a small force to investigate the situation within the Imperium, to verify the mad rumours of Horus turning traitor and gauge what measures should be taken by the First Legion in response.

The Lion chose 15 of his fastest capital ships and a small host of warriors, veterans all, to accompany him and charted a course to Tanagra. This system lay at the very edge of the Imperium's newly-laid borders and sat at the conflux of a number of stable warp corridors that would allow rapid redeployment to locations deeper in Imperial space. Furthermore, it hosted a Forge World of some size, Diamat, which could serve to re-equip and rearm the Dark Angels fleet and supply them with news of the Imperium. It was a well-laid plan, one that considered almost every possibility, but what the Lion could not know was that Diamat had long since given its loyalty to the Warmaster and had taken up arms in his cause. Almost immediately upon arrival, the Dark Angels came under fire from Traitor craft, swiftly verifying the rumours of civil war within the Imperium, and records discovered within the broken forge after the Lion had pacified it confirmed that Horus was at its head. Amid the ruins of the forge, the Lion would discover that these plans of rebellion were no sudden madness but a long-seated cancer. For stored in the depths of the Forge World's vaults was a trove of vast ordinarus built to a pattern unknown in the Imperium, based on a technology long since forbidden to the priests of Mars and commissioned in secret by Horus some 50 years before.

He was met in the ruins of Diamat by Perturabo, the lord of the Iron Warriors whom the Lion believed to still hold true to his oaths of loyalty to the Emperor. From Perturabo he learned of the Night Haunter's assault on the Eastern Fringe and the massacres at Isstvan, though the whole truth was concealed from him by the false Primarch. For Perturabo acted to divert the Lion on Horus' orders, keeping him from Terra and Isstvan by means of Konrad Curze – a lure to keep the First Legion occupied while the rebellion continued apace. When the Lion departed Diamat he did so just as the Warmaster had planned, throwing himself into a war that would keep his powerful Legion neutered while Horus pressed on to Terra – worse still, he left the recovered treasures of Diamat in the hands of the Iron Warriors, from whence they would pass to Horus himself. Little realising that his brother had played him false, the Lion departed for the nearby Forge World of Triplex with those forces he had brought to Diamat, hoping to reach it before his brother and called for all his Legion still fighting past the bounds of the galaxy to join him there. The Imperium stood on the brink of destruction and the Dark Angels would not permit such a tragedy to come to pass while they still drew breath.

The first of the Triplex defence barges to respond was annihilated before it could even issue a warning, a barrage of lance beams striking it from a range far beyond that which standard Imperial technology could reach. As if at a prearranged signal, the black-clad flotilla systematically reduced every ship within their astounding weapons' range to broken hulks and drifting wreckage. They struck at the Mechanicum's defence craft and transport ships alike and made no attempt to parley or issue warnings or demands. Every craft that bore the Eye of Horus in their path burned, those that attempted to fight fared no better than those that fled, save that their deaths found them faster. A single squadron of Night

Lords heavy cruisers and frigates engaged the foe at extreme range, the Legiones Astartes craft managing at last to provide some real resistance to the newcomers, but even these formidable ships found themselves hard pressed in battle. Though almost equal in number to the black craft, the Night Lords attacked with uncharacteristic hesitancy, for unlike the Mechanicum craft they recognised the subtle heraldry of these ships. This was a small fragment of the First Legion – a single squadron of the relic cruisers gifted them by the Emperor Himself – moreover, it was a harbinger of something far more terrible. The Warmaster had plotted to send the First Legion far from his rebellion, all to have one

warrior lost in the dark places of the galaxy while he stole the Emperor's throne, and now it seemed that the one man that Horus did not want to face had returned. The Lion had entered the war, and worse yet, the stoic Lord of Caliban had been driven to anger by the actions of his brother.

Within the space of a few silent moments the lead Night Lords cruiser, the *Shadow of Justice*, was raked with pinpoint lance fire and crippled, left alive but unable to fend off the squadrons of Dreadclaw boarding craft that set upon it. Rather than attempt to save their stricken brother, the other cruisers abandoned the fight, trading valour for pragmatism and withdrawing so that they might fight again. Aboard the *Shadow of Justice*, the survivors of the Night Lords crew braced themselves for their final battle, hoping perhaps to escape the inevitable fate that loomed over them, but the warriors that emerged from the boarding craft offered them no honourable death. Bearing the hourglass emblem of the Dreadwing, they seized key junctions and bulkheads before flooding entire sections of the craft with phosphex and bio-phages, slaughtering most of the Night Lords without even raising a blade. Only the bridge was spared annihilation, left isolated as the screams and gurgles of the dying echoed throughout the ship, and then once all had become silent, the Lion himself smashed aside the reinforced and shielded entry portal. Gunfire and blades struck the battered armour of the Primarch of the First Legion to little avail, its battle-tested surface proof against such paltry attacks, and the Lion cleared the chaff from his path with a few mighty sweeps of the Lion Sword. The praetor-commander of the *Shadow of Justice* lunged from concealment, having sacrificed his kin in exchange for a single strike at the Primarch's back, only to find himself caught in the vice-like grip of the Lion. His dying stroke foiled with casual indifference, the Night Lords praetor spat his curses at the Lion and prepared for his death, but this was not to be his end, and before dragging his reluctant guest to the depths of the *Invincible Reason*, the Lion spoke:

"I was content in the dark places of the galaxy, content to kill in the name of empire and be forgotten. But you have summoned me back with your pitiful flailings at rebellion, for you have endangered the empire my toil has built and for that there is a price to be paid. First we shall speak of my brothers, Curze and Horus, and then you shall learn what terror truly means for the brief remnants of your existence."

The Fall of Triplex

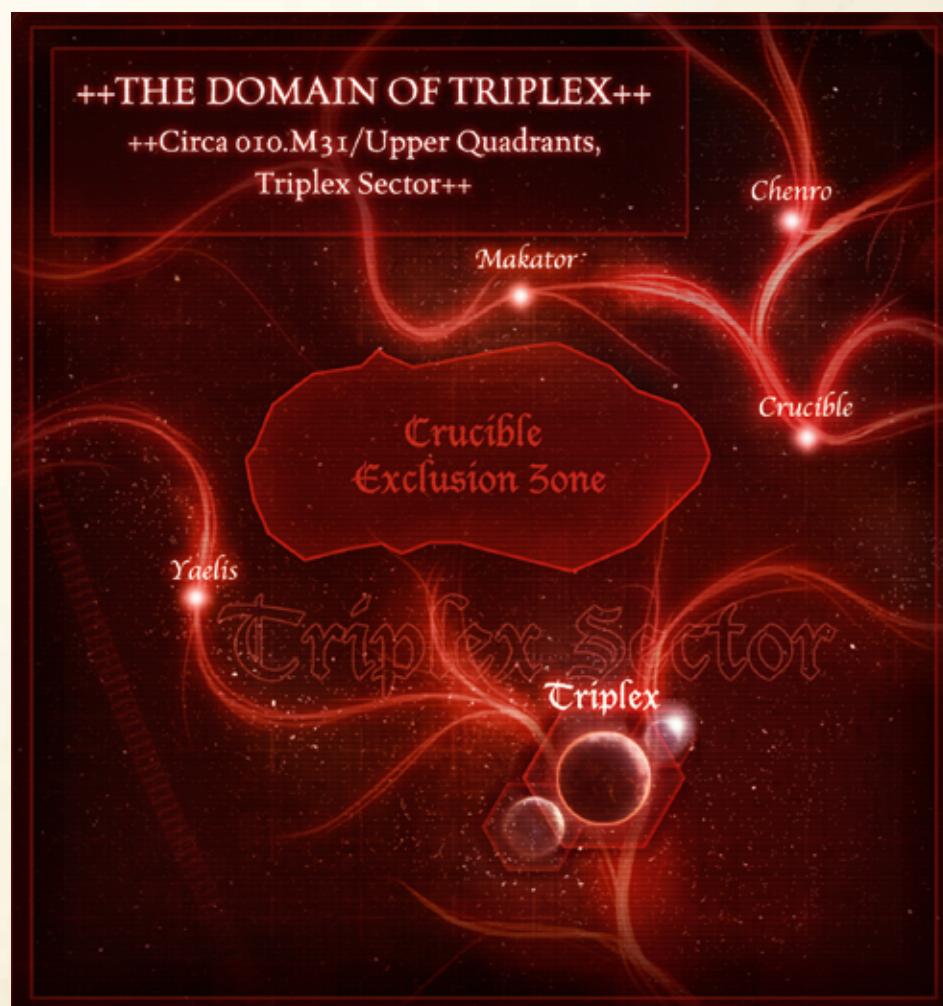
The Dark Angels flotilla, which numbered 18 capital class ships and no more than 100 frigates and lesser combat craft, took up station in the outer system as the lords of Triplex gathered all their might in orbit of Galatia, the closest of its remaining two intact Forge Worlds. More than 100 bulky Mechanicum gunships and defence barges, the remains of the Night Lords squadron and even those vessels still fresh from the great orbital shipyards of Galatia assembled but, still uncertain in the face of the might of the Dark Angels, did not immediately fall upon the smaller fleet. This was to be their undoing, for as the interrogator adepts of the Firewing wrung secrets from the mind of the captured Night Lords praetor, more of the Dark Angels responded to the summons from their lord. As though called forth from the blackest depths of space, warp apertures formed across the system and disgorged dozens of cruisers and other black-clad capital ships, for the fleet of the First Legion far exceeded in number many of their brethren and had now been brought to bear on Triplex en-masse by command of the Lion. It was to be an object lesson, not of fear of what might happen should the foe resist, as the Night Lords had attempted to teach Thramas, but of the certainty of destruction for those who dared oppose the Lion. The black-clad squadrons of the First fell upon the mighty fleet of Triplex and its allies as they huddled within the protective constellations of kill-sats, gun platforms and vast shipyards in orbit of Galatia and tore them to pieces.

It could not be called a battle. Striking from every vector nearly 100 First Legion capital ships fell upon the Traitor fleet, their relic weapons clawing the foe from the sky with terrifying efficiency. Outnumbered a paltry two-to-one, the Dark Angels eschewed any pretence of complex strategy and simply battered aside the lesser ships that opposed them, leaving a dense field of spinning debris in orbit to pour down upon Galatia like a rain of fire. As the Mechanicum gun-barges erupted in flames about them, the Night Lords squadron abandoned the defence and mounted a concerted assault on the Dark Angels battleship *Undying Will* and, in a ferocious exchange of fire, managed to cripple it with only the loss of two of their own. Having forced an opening in the encircling Dark Angels armada, the Night Lords, fighting with the ferocity of the doomed, tore free of the First Legion fleet, and the surviving three cruisers and their

escorts disappeared into the dubious safety of the Warp. Those Mechanicum barges that remained died in defence of their forge, each continuing to fire even as the Dark Angels cut them to pieces, the servitor crews working to maintain the barrage even as they burned. Despite this enforced bravery, they could not stay the hand of death that hung over them, and within the space of a few short hours the Dark Angels had full control of the orbit of Galatia.

The destruction of their fleet did not lessen the resolve of the Magi of Triplex Galatia, the cold logic of the followers of the tech-cult having no place for fear or despair. They set their formidable surface defences and prepared to repel a planetary landing, assuming that no attacker would dare threaten the vast factories of their forge-fanes with an indiscriminate orbital bombardment and that they could hold the Dark Angels at bay until reinforcements from Phall or out-system arrived to lift the siege. However, the Dark Angels did not intend either a lengthy siege or conventional

assault, instead assembling the massed ranks of the Deathwing to render a quick end to the fighting. Having sworn their oaths before the Lion himself, the Deathwing launched themselves into the heart of Galatia's main forge-fane, loosed from the orbiting cruisers as a storm of drop pods and landing craft thick enough to leave Galatia in shadow as they fell. Dozens of the packed pods were incinerated by the fire of volkite defence guns and the screaming beams of photon cannon, with hundreds of Deathwing veterans disgorged from the flaming wreckage as broken corpses, but many more reached the surface intact and stormed into the fray. The pride of the Deathwing met the Galatian Thallax cohorts and tech-thrall custodian regiments in the tangled metal canyons of the forge halls, Calibanite blades pitted against the arcane technology of the Mechanicum in a battle that raged for much of the first day of the conflict. True to their oaths, the Deathwing cleared and held a beachhead within the forge halls, spending their lives to secure a safe landing site for the warriors that followed in their wake.



The second wave of the Dark Angels assault was led by the initiates of the Dreadwing and the Eskaton Marduk Sedras in the ceremonial Terminator plate of the Order of the Shattered Sceptre, a warrior that had overseen the death of worlds beyond count in the name of the Emperor and their Primarch. Plasma flame scoured clean the ancient forge-fanes of Galatia, the Interemptors and Terminator-armoured Naufragia leaving no stone upon stone as they advanced, a desecration intended to draw out the Mechanicum and force them to commit the bulk of their forces into battle or face the slow annihilation of their sacred halls. Their plan would prove even more successful than they had hoped, though perhaps more than even the First Legion had been prepared for. Galatia, and its greater sibling Phall, had long experimented with forbidden technologies and dark theorem, subverting the rule of Mars to increase their own power unnoticed at the very edge of the Imperium, and now at the brink of destruction they unleashed that power openly. Towering automata of unknown design punched holes in reality with arcane beam weapons and unleashed raw warp energy upon the Dark Angels, while Harpax

artificia swarmed in the sky above them, their intelligence growing with their numbers as they tore into the Space Marines below, forcing the Dark Angels to halt their advance and fortify the positions they had claimed. With automata forged by the twisted and forbidden technologies mastered by the fallen magi of Galatia rampaging through the landing zone and the Dreadwing hard pressed to hold them in check and their heavy armour neutered by the cybertheurgic arts of the tech-magi, Lion El'Jonson invoked the ancient Ikaros Contingency and instructed the Masters of the Armoury to wake the Excindio that slumbered in the deepest stasis vaults of the *Invincible Reason*.

Those Dark Angels still fighting on the surface withdrew to carefully prepared and fortified positions as the *Invincible Reason* detached a section of its lower hull, casting it into the churning atmosphere of Galatia like a crude drop pod where it blazed briefly in the grip of gravity before punching into the towering spires and halls around the Dark Angels' landing zone. The ruined slab of starship, embedded in the rubble of Galatia's once proud central fane, hinged and opened, revealing an interior studded

with the telltale form of stasis projectors and power field generators, all rendered non-functional by the catastrophic impact and released its cargo. That cargo was truly terrible, 12 nightmares torn from the pages of history and the darkest horrors of Old Night on Terra, immense inhuman forms of sculpted ceramite and steel adorned with weapons long forbidden by edict of the Emperor Himself. These were the Excindio, the last of the silica anima that had once been the plague of the Golden Age of Mankind, mutilated and bound to serve the Lion should the Mechanicum be so foolish as to go to war with the Imperium. Their neural cores immune to the crude cybertheurgy of the Mechanicum, the Excindio tore into the creations of the fallen magi that would come to be known as the Dark Mechanicum, the forbidden arts that had forged them in aeons now long lost far superior to the stumbling efforts of Galatia's nascent cult. Into that hellish battlefield of screeching automata and whirling metal monsters strode the Lion, the one creature that even the Excindio, whose hatred for all organic life knew no bounds, refused to oppose, seeking the head of the serpent, the commander of Galatia's forces.

The Ikaros Contingency

The Mechanicum sat at the heart of the Emperor's new Imperium. It was the beating heart of its military and industrial base, supplying the industrial might by which the armies of the Great Crusade were forged and maintained, its far flung Forge Worlds were the cogs around which the campaign to liberate the galaxy turned. Without the Tech-Priests of Mars there could have been no Great Crusade, for the Mechanicum had become an essential part of the Emperor's plans. It was also the greatest threat to them in the years before Horus turned to treachery, for the Mechanicum stood apart from the careful order the Emperor had established. Of all the Imperium's institutions, they still worshipped a god openly, worked to their own rituals and creed that had little to do with the Imperial Truth. Worse, should they ever rise up against the Emperor, they could turn to their own formidable armies to prosecute a war against Him and turn the very technology of the Great Crusade against His servants. Such a war would be the end of the Imperium.

To counter such a threat, the Emperor had established a number of contingency plans, several of which remain shrouded in mystery to this day. Of those known to history, the Ikaros Contingency is perhaps the most dire. A directive issued only to Lion El'Jonson and the warriors of the First Legion, the Ikaros Contingency consisted of two distinct clauses. The first was an Imperial warrant empowering the Dark Angels to keep in their possession a number of relics from the period of history known as Old Night, technology that had long been forbidden to any other institution as dangerous and unstable. It was, however, a technology that shared few similarities with that of Mars and as such was resistant to the wiles of the techno-magi and anathematic to their machines of war. The second clause, had it become common knowledge, would have been cause enough to start the war the Emperor sought to avoid, for it empowered Lion El'Jonson and his warriors to conduct pre-emptive combat operations to neutralise elements of the Mechanicum deemed to have become '*contrary to the needs of the Imperium*'. This final clause is known to have been invoked eight times in the history of the Imperium, though details of most of these incidents remain sealed within the vaults of the Dark Angels, with the encounter at Triplex the only openly acknowledged occurrence at this time. It would not be the last, for the Lion would not stay his hand now that open war had consumed the Imperium, and would bring censure to many more Forge Worlds he deemed '*contrary to the needs of the Imperium*' before the end of the Horus Heresy.

Instead, as the nightmares he had unleashed hunted and killed as once they had done, the Lion faced the greatest of the fallen magi's creations as it stood warden over the sealed salvation-vaults of the Galatian archmagi. A huge multi-legged construct of brass and steel loomed over the Primarch, its tail primed with arcane weapons and scythe-bladed claws reaching for the lord of Caliban, a monster greater even than the beasts of that distant world. There are few tales of what would follow, for on this battlefield no mortal human could survive, it was the haunt of demons and gods alone. What is known is that when the Dark Angels returned to the field of battle as the sun grew dim and night fell on Galatia, Lion El'Jonson stood alone amongst a field of metal corpses and

the dormant shells of the surviving seven Excindio, whose limited power reserves had run dry and plunged them back into a state of torpor. The deep salvation-vaults were unearthed by the Dreadwing and Eskaton Sardas himself oversaw the purging of those chambers with phosphex, slaughtering the surviving members of the Galatian leadership, and then proceeding to set magna charges throughout the forge halls and manufactoria. Over the course of the next few weeks, the Dark Angels systematically culled any surviving automata or Tech-Priests and destroyed all trace of the forbidden technology that had been unleashed against them. Only the orbital shipyards were left intact, that they might serve the Imperium in its war and aid in the repairs the Dark Angels fleet had incurred in seizing Galatia.

Once they had completed the final destruction of that world, leaving nothing but ruin and rubble, the Lion turned his gaze to Phall, the largest of the three Forge Worlds of Triplex and now the only one that remained intact. Phall had gathered about it

all of the military force that remained in the system, a significant fleet and potent army stood ready to defend the world, though still no greater than the force that had been obliterated in orbit of Galatia. The slow destruction of Galatia had left the magi of Phall much time to consider the perils of their situation, with some choosing to gather their apprentices and chattels before fleeing the system, while others refused to leave the planet. When the Dark Angels left Galatia and approached Phall they did so in attack formation, fully expecting to find a world set in arms against them. However, the fighting on Phall, though brutal, was concluded long before their arrival as the more orthodox of the remaining magi put their renegade brethren to the sword and offered the Lion their unconditional surrender. The servants of the Omnissiah saw value only in their survival, and that seemed better assured by the sacrifice of the few rather than in stubborn defiance. Likewise, the Lion prized pragmatism over petty vengeance and knew well the value of a Forge World like Phall to the Imperium and to any campaign that would have to be fought in the Thramas sector. So he chose to accept their surrender, taking from Phall any and all remnants of the dark research of those that had been purged for his own and placing Eskaton Sardas and a garrison of the fearsome Dreadwing warriors that had brought proud Galatia to ruin to administer the world in his name and to feed the hunger of his Legion as it prosecuted a new kind of war in the Emperor's name.

The Siege of Thramas

Thramas, since it had raised its banner in defiance of the Night Lords, had endured a near constant state of siege. A costly endeavour that was both a symptom of the madness that consumed the VIIIth Legion and the cause of much friction within it. It was the orders of Nakrid Thole that established and maintained the siege, with warriors of those warbands loyal to him heeding these orders over and above those issued by other commanders within the Legion and dividing its forces at a critical point in the campaign. The blockade thrown around the system, raids on shipping and on the surface provided little in terms of material gain and were a constant drain on the resources available to the Night Lords; the capture of Thramas would have alleviated such concerns but Thole lacked both the manpower and intent to prosecute such an action. He was instead determined to bleed and torment the world that had left him scarred and humiliated, ordering his troops to engage in murder raids against isolated civilian settlements and to deploy gene-phage munitions within packed spire-hubs. Those few prisoners of import that were taken during the fighting fell under Nakrid Thole's skinning knife rather than the excruciators of the Night Lords' skilled interrogators, and what munitions and engines of war were seized during attacks on blockade runners were quickly consumed by the efforts to encircle and reduce the resistance of Thramas. It was a great folly, but one whose pure malevolence would long be remembered in the annals of the Horus Heresy.

A Bloody Equilibrium

From the unwilling confessions of his prisoners, the Lion knew two true facts: Horus had turned upon his father and was indeed leading a rebellion and the Night Haunter had followed him, charged with seizing the worlds of the Eastern Fringe for his new master. He knew that even now Horus must be pressing the defences of Terra, for while the Emperor's Throne World still stood so too did the Imperium, but also he knew that should Horus make a ruin of the rest of the Imperium then Terra itself would be worthless, an isolated throne in a sea of death. He was forced to balance his loyalty to the Emperor as a man and to the Imperium as a monument to that man, to decide which held the balance of significance in the eyes of history and the people who would write it. Lion El'Jonson, ever practical in the face of disaster, understood that he would be too late to forestall an assault on Terra, that the Emperor's fate was decided, but that the Imperium could still be saved by his actions.

The Night Haunter's goals he understood, though his methods escaped the pragmatic lord of the First Legion, his piecemeal ravaging of the Eastern Fringe a mad puzzle that Lion El'Jonson's ordered mind could not explain with military logic. As such his initial movements into the wider Thramas sector were cautious, designed to protect his warriors from ambush or other surprises. With some 70,000 warriors of the First Legion, over twice that in support troops and three demi-Legio forces drawn from different Titan Legions, the Lion possessed a significant force of arms. Though it was outnumbered by the Night

Lords and those Traitor forces that had fled Triplex, those forces were dispersed across two whole sectors while his own host was concentrated in a single system. Planning to capitalise on this advantage, the Lion made his initial foray into just two systems, the key junctures of Sheol III and Yaelis. Both worlds had already changed hands several times in the fighting, being both vital links between the Aegis and Thramas sectors and key lines of transit around the Crucible exclusion zone, and few remained among the ruins but killers. Forewarned by those fleeing the death of Triplex Galatia, the defenders of Sheol and Yaelis knew who it was that came for them and yet they did not flee. The madness of war had taken full hold of those that yet dwelt in Thramas and its environs, and few that still fought would accept surrender as an option. The Night Lords and their slaves were too few to defeat the massed Dark Angels, but then that was not their intent, they sold their lives and those of the massed regiments of conscripts and slaves they threw at the Dark Angels simply to slow their advance.

The conquest of these two worlds would occupy the Dark Angels for almost a full month, for once the Night Lords exhausted the lives of their chattel in open battle they resorted to hit and run assaults and guerrilla warfare to harry the occupying forces. A few hundred midnight-clad warriors held tens of thousands in place by their savage skill at arms, buying time for the Night Haunter to prepare and reminding their cousins in the First Legion of the cost one must pay to vanquish the Legiones Astartes. Yet the assault on these first worlds also yielded something other than death and blood, for

once the black banners of the First Legion were flown in battle, the survivors of those Loyalist regiments that had fought against the Night Lords rallied to them. At first, it was only small units that had managed to hide from the victorious Night Lords but, as word spread to nearby worlds, entire regiments began to arrive, battered and scarred but still not yet defeated.

Hope had returned to Thramas in the form of the Lion and his sons, and the flame of defiance that had almost been extinguished by the Night Haunter flared back into life and raced across the stars far faster than the Lion and his forces could ever hope to advance. Though delayed, the First Legion could not be stopped and, once Sheol and Yaelis were scoured clean of Night Lords cells, the Dark Angels pushed into the surrounding worlds, careful not to press too far or spread their numbers too thin. They left few openings for the Night Lords to take advantage of, made wary by the first battles against fellow Space Marines, and gathered to them all the allies they could find, bolstering their forces with each new victory. Within another month of hard fought planetary assaults and equally gruelling counter-insurgency campaigns, they reached Crucible, where Captain-general Morhde and the last desperate remnants of his Nightwatch still held out against the Night Lords.

This proved to be the extent of their reach, now spread too thin protecting the dozen worlds they held to advance further without becoming vulnerable to the Night Lords and their allies. The heart of the Eastern Fringe still lay under the Night Haunter's control, and the core of his Legion held an iron cordon around Thramas itself, while Gulgorahd's borders still burned with the fires of war. Newly-arrived detachments of the Dark Angels, rearmed and refitted at Triplex, mounted a second front with an attack through Verstun in the Aegis sector, only to find themselves bogged down fighting Traitor armies mustering from Memlock and the vast expanse of the Heraclid nebula. The fighting was now spread across four separate sectors, with tens of millions of warriors in arms on over a hundred active warzones. It was a bloody equilibrium of war, the Dark Angels not numerous enough to force a breakthrough without abandoning those worlds they had retaken and the Night Lords too widely spread to push back their Loyalist brethren. While it lasted neither could claim victory and both remained pinned in the Eastern Fringe, unable to retreat while their foe remained unbroken at their back and incapable of forcing a breach in the front lines to advance.

The Lost, the Fallen and the Broken

With the Imperium riven and broken by Horus' civil war, neither side could call upon the nearly unlimited resources that had fuelled the Great Crusade. They could rely on no reinforcements save those they could rally by their own schemes, and the war-torn worlds along the front lines of the war, the once-prosperous worlds of the Aegis, Thramas, Triplex and Gulgorahd sectors were all but exhausted. Both sides were forced to turn to other sources to procure the edge that would be needed to break the stubborn and bloody stalemate that had developed before what few resources that remained to them were spent. For, with fighting along the front showing no signs of abating, that end loomed ever closer.

The constant raids and assaults on the world of Thramas took a heavy toll on the Night Lords, for though combat losses were few, the munitions they expended were all but irreplaceable after the loss of Triplex. By order of the Faceless Prince, as Nakrid Thole had become known among his kin after his flight from Thramas, they had thrown a blockade around that system, attempting to stop all ships from entering or leaving while the siege continued. Yet swift frigates continued to brave the blockade to bring word of the battle to the Lion and to deliver vital supplies to the defenders of Thramas. Rather than simply obliterate these intruders with their heavy guns, Thole ordered his warriors to cripple and board them, clearing the ships with blades only to preserve ammunition and stripping them of all usable supplies before scuttling the captured craft.

Along the front lines of the war, the main body of the Night Lords struck again and again at the defences of the Dark Angels, seeking not to secure territory or attack the gathered host of their foe, but rather to

destroy or capture his supply dumps and transport ships. The Night Hunter fought with a desperate fury, ever at the forefront of any attack and always searching for his brother, Lion El'Jonson, seeking perhaps to prove his nightmares wrong by seeking a death other than that which had haunted him for so long. The most loyal of his sons, the warriors Sevatar and Anrek Barbatos, struggled to rein in their master's mania and sought to avoid seeing the VIIIth Legion drawn into a disastrous confrontation with the main strength of the Dark Angels. By means of careful suggestion and outright subversion of his often contradictory decrees, they turned his lust for death into a means to both resupply their own troops and weaken the Dark Angels with constant raids.

Rather than allow the Night Hunter's unpredictable madness to draw the Legion into disaster, the veterans of the old Legion sought to make use of the Midnight Treaties. These hidden texts were bargains struck by Curze during the Great Crusade with certain factions along the fringes of human space, factions that did not fit within the tidy bounds of the Emperor's future, but that could still offer the Night Lords power: abhuman breeds that skirted the boundaries of humanity, reavers and madmen that preyed upon their fellows and Forge Worlds whose doctrines were unacceptable to Mars. All these and more

had been concealed by the Night Hunter in return for their loyalty, unnoticed along the dark edges of the maps created by the Great Crusade. Small scout craft, crewed by the most loyal and captained by the most trusted of the Legion, were sent forth to distant and hidden stars. Many of these ships were lost, some crippled by the swelling warp storms that scoured the area, others intercepted and destroyed by the fast cutters of the Dark Angels or Thramassi cruisers, but some few would reach their destinations and issue the Night Lords' summons.

The brutish warriors of Tohruk, debased cousins of the more common Ogryn bred by a long-dead outpost of Mankind as shock troops and living weapons, bolstered the Night Lords assault companies in their attacks on the Dark Angels, fodder for the exhausted guns of the First Legion. Cannibal legions from Glabro, battle-psykers from the lost moons of Thex and a dozen more aberrations were set loose upon the front lines, each a further drain on Lion El'Jonson's strength and further slowing the progress of the First Legion.



The Midnight Treaties

Many have lamented the numerous small betrayals that would be discovered over the course of the war, the liberties taken by each Legion in order to gain some advantage over their kin. Horus built his own network of loyalty, Lorgar found new gods and Guilliman built an empire of his own. The Night Haunter was no different, his Legion had always lacked in the favour shown to others by the great Forge Worlds of the Mechanicum and the tithe fleets of the new Imperium. It chose to deal with limited supplies in its own fashion, a part of this solution was the Midnight Treaties. These were the bargains sealed by Konrad Curze with an uncounted spread of worlds hidden in the dark fringes of space over which his Legion had been set as warden, worlds that, much like the Night Lords themselves, found little acceptance from the strict lawmakers of the Great Crusade.

Rather than dispose of them in fire and blood, bleeding his Legion further while Dorn and Guilliman grew strong on the empires they had founded, Curze followed a different path. To those worlds that accepted his rule and tithed directly to the Night Lords a portion of their wealth, be it in bodies or in machines, he offered to keep them safe from the threat of annihilation. It is ironic that where the Emperor decreed only death for these worlds, the sin of their technology or genes unforgivable in His eyes, the Night Haunter would offer life, yet it is from the industry of hidden worlds like Ulan Hûda that the Night Lords grew in the last years of the Great Crusade. It is also through the taint of recruits from the debased populace of these hidden worlds that their stock was slowly corrupted and brought low – a curse that would weigh heavily on the Legion during the war for Thramas.

Yet worst of all the terrors unleashed from the darkness of the fringe was the predator-forge of Ulan Hûda. Long hidden in the storm that haunted the edge of the galaxy, that fallen Forge World had long devoted itself to the forbidden and had even developed a crude array of engines to move the entire Forge World through the Warp. By means of this, and other arcane obscenities, Ulan Hûda fed upon other worlds beyond the borders of the Imperium, tearing them apart to supply its forges and leaving only shattered systems in its wake.

Ulan Hûda had long been allied to the Night Lords in secret, supplying its Titans, the Legio Phasma, to them in exchange for their silence, and now they loosed it upon Thramas. At first only whispers reached Thramas of the destruction, of the silence and emptiness where border posts of isolated colonies should be, but there soon followed the harrowing accounts brought by the survivors. Entire worlds had been overrun by the monstrous automata hordes of Ulan Hûda and then shattered and consumed, the broken corpses of planets left lifeless and empty. With almost all of the Thramassi forces locked in the defence of Crucible and Thramas, there was little that could be done to curb the terrible appetite of the magi of Ulan Hûda, save to send word to the Lion and hope for the siege to be lifted.

Last of all the playing pieces to arrive was the Brotherhood of the Shattered Shield, a detachment of the Vth Legion, the White Scars, which had been wandering in far places when Horus declared his rebellion. They breached realspace at Nostramo hoping to find refit and resupply only to behold the ruin that the Night Haunter had made of his old home, with silence the only reply to their calls to Great Crusade bases and way stations. Zhenjin Khan and his warriors were soon made guests of the Night Lords, who informed them of the Warmaster's orders to pacify the rebellious Eastern Fringe and of the traitors that waited for them there. Though veterans of the Great Crusade, Zhenjin Khan and his Brotherhood had heard only tales of the First Legion, of their matchless pride and the many secrets they kept from the other Legions. Weighed against the loyalty they held to Horus, who had always been a friend and patron to the White Scars, it was a simple choice for Zhenjin Khan to offer his blade as thanks for the supplies they had been granted and set his ships on course to rendezvous with the Night Haunter. With this last addition, some 3,000 veterans of the Great Crusade and six capital class warships, the Night Lords controlled a force great enough to challenge the Dark Angels in open war, word was sent to all commands – the Night Haunter would go to meet his brother.

A Gathering of Malice

The balance of war was shifting, the tide of fate ever in motion seemed to have turned against the Loyalist cause. The ships sent by the Lion to seek aid at the old Great Crusade bases of Tigrus and Honourum had failed to return and the growing turbulence in the aether that was the Ruinstorm blocked any attempt to contact those of his brothers he hoped had remained true to their vows. Thramas, still besieged by the vengeful Night Lords, remained beyond the Lion's grasp and his Legion was effectively paralysed by the need to protect the vulnerable worlds they had liberated in the months after the fall of Crucible. There was no question of their retreat, for the First Legion would not accept defeat, but neither did it seem that they would be able to claim victory, all across the front the black-clad warriors of Caliban braced themselves for the storm they knew approached.

Its first stirrings were seen in a wave of attacks across the sector, howling mobs of slave soldiers and abhuman shock troops dropped on each of the worlds held by the Loyalists with only light support from the Traitor Space Marines. Against the warriors of the First Legion, these lesser troops stood little chance, sacrificed solely to allow Night Lords cruisers observing the landings from orbit to chart the strength of the foe and to drain their supplies. It was a cruel but effective stratagem, its malice carefully planned and as much for the amusement of the watching Night Lords as for its effectiveness on the battlefield. Such had always been the nature of the Night Haunter's twisted sons, but now severed from the constraints of Imperial law they made little attempt to conceal their relish for such bloody excess.

On Yrdek, the drop sites chosen by the Night Lords were over a site known to have been mined by the Dark Angels months beforehand, the conscript militia blasted apart in a storm of explosions simply to test the extent of the field and to amuse their taskmasters. Amid the ice spires of Chenro IX, the VIIIth Legion overseers wagered on how long it would take the Dark Angels to slaughter the crude auxilia armour sent against their defences while they counted the emplaced guns hidden on the spires. The Thungaard volunteer regiments that had landed on Sedricce, the deepest point in the Dark Angels' defensive line, only survived to return to their dropships due to the actions of the White Scars of the Shattered Shield, whose warriors had chosen to allow the

retreat of the decimated Loyalists troops to evacuate those that had survived the abortive attack. This chivalrous effort earned Zhenjin a salute from the praetor commanding the First Legion brigade, but the bemused Night Lords began to style the White Scars khan 'The Saviour' in a joke peculiar to the sensibilities of the Nostraman warriors. The insult implicit in the title was not lost on the White Scars, nor was the callous nature of their new allies or the apparent honour of those they had been ordered to consider traitors.

Preparations complete, the Night Haunter himself, roused to some semblance of his old self by the presence of his brother and the promise of blood and death, called the Night Lords to battle. He summoned all of the disparate bands of his Legion to assemble, leaving only a skeleton force to attend to its battles elsewhere in the Eastern Fringe. Some 100,000 of the Night Lords took their places at 50 separate staging points along the front established by the Dark Angels, their warlords all present on Nergante where the Night Haunter held court. Caring only for the confrontation that was to come, Konrad Curze did little more than brood over the gathering of his sons, some a reminder of lost glories and others of the curse that had claimed the heart of the Legion, while it fell to others like Sevatar and Barbatos to set strategy for the assault. Plans were set and grudges settled in the bloody tradition of Nostramo, by hidden schemes and sharp blades, a scene that left the White Scars uneasy.

Of all the warlords of the VIIIth Legion, only one failed to heed the Night Haunter's call. The Faceless Prince, his hatred fixed on Thramas alone, would not abandon the siege of that battered world and kept those forces loyal first to him at their stations. By this time, Thramas had endured almost two years of siege, ravaged by constant raids and tormented by the phage warheads dropped on its surface at Thole's orders. Of its outer bodies, every last moon and asteroid in the Thramas system belonged to Thole, but Thramas itself still resisted. Now, with much of his strength stripped away by the Night Haunter's command, Thole lacked the numbers to do more than maintain his blockade around the system. Instead he turned to darker means for his final revenge, offering a tribute of those Thramassi prisoners he held in the bowels of his ship as thralls in order to bring the predator-forge Ulan Hûda to Thramas.

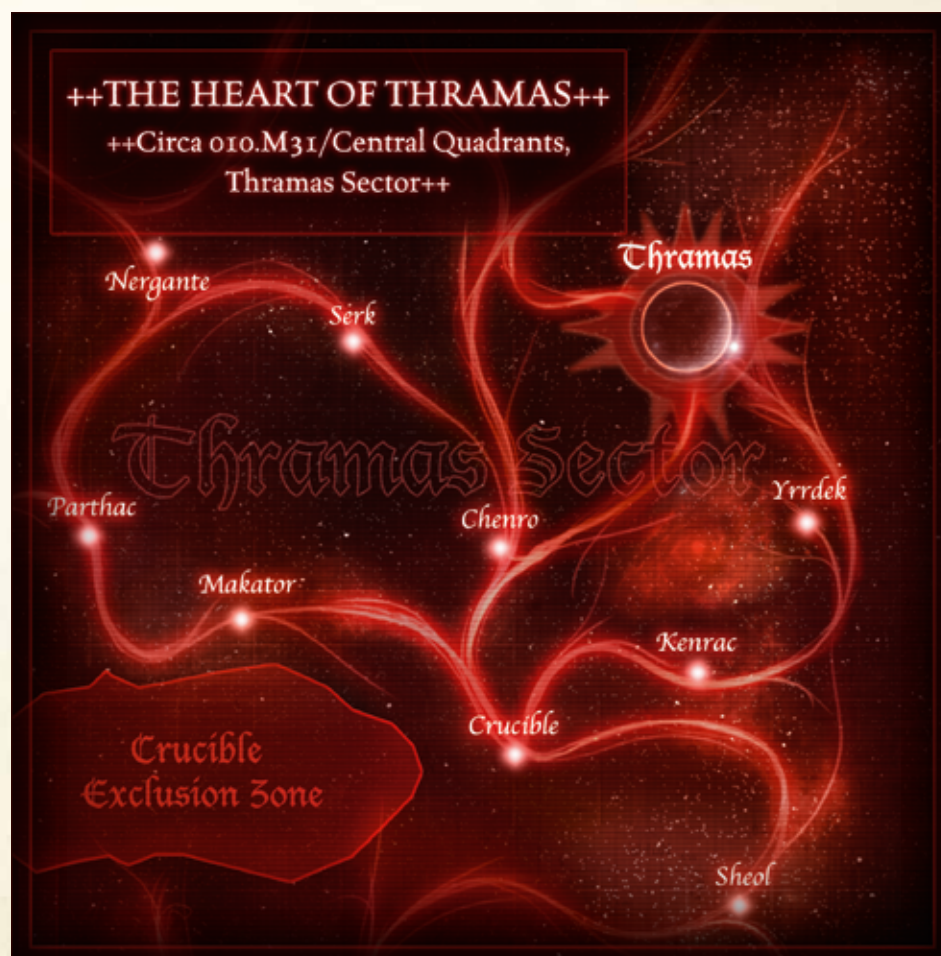
His call answered, the metal mass of Ulan Hûda Sundered the veil of the Warp and tore into realspace trailing balefire like a cloak, and began to feast upon the outermost planets of that system. Cutting beams with a calibre measured in kilometres and fleets of servitor drones made short work of the great rocks orbiting far from Thramas' sun and the predator-forge turned its gaze upon the prey promised it by Nakrid Thole. Death had come for Thramas and the last few Loyalist ships in the system broke from orbit of the doomed world hoping to bring word of its plight to the Lion, whose troops fought for their lives half a sector away.

The Weight of their Choices

In the final days of 008.M31 the assault began in earnest, with massed Night Lords attacks falling on a half dozen worlds. These were unlike the raids that the Dark Angels had repelled before, but the total war as practised by the Legiones Astartes, an assault of fury and overwhelming firepower whose goal was simple annihilation. Three whole Chapters of the Night Lords landed on Chenro, using the data gathered in their previous attacks to

precisely target the First Legion redoubts and forcing them onto the defensive. The single Chapter of the Dark Angels was overwhelmed, the last detachments calling in fire support from cruisers engaged in orbit onto their own positions to hold back the Night Lords as they struggled to evacuate. At Sedricce, the Night Lords battleship *Tenebrous Will* and its attendant cruisers drove off the Dark Angels craft in orbit and subjected the surface to a sustained bombardment, flattening every identified defensive position and devastating the planet's surface. The Night Lords that landed in the bombardment's wake found a few intact bunkers that had weathered the firestorms, taking a vicious glee in the slow manner they chose to breach and clear them, much to the dismay of their White Scars allies.

The last of these bunkers held the Dark Angels commander in charge of the world's defence, who demanded the Night Lords praetor meet him in single combat to answer for his betrayal of the oaths made to the Emperor. The defiant Dark Angels commander, badly wounded during the bombardment, stood little chance against the fresh Night Lords praetor, who toyed



cruelly with his opponent in front of the gathered warriors before killing him and taking his Calibanite warblade and the survivors of his force as trophies. Only the intervention of Zhenjin Khan and his White Scars force preserved the Loyalist warriors from a grim fate in the skinning pits, 'the Saviour' fighting a duel of his own to claim their lives and the warblade of the fallen Dark Angels commander, bringing them aboard his own ships though it bought him no respect in the eyes of the Night Lords. The White Scars made little effort to join the fighting after Sedricce, Zhenjin spending an increasing amount of time sequestered with his 'captives', an obsession whose intent the Night Lords assumed was malign.

In total, four worlds fell into the hands of the Night Lords, though they made no attempt to consolidate these victories and swiftly moved on to their next targets. Only the Night Hunter lingered, searching every world obsessively for his brother and letting no chance for battle pass him by, throwing himself into every engagement with a desperate fury. The main target of the second wave was the now barren wasteland of Crucible, a planetscape covered in the ruins of previous battles and dominated by hastily assembled fortifications and redoubts. Here the Dark Angels had drawn up much of their strength, for it was the gateway to Triplex, the sole source of their supplies and munitions, and they were determined to hold it no matter the cost. In orbit, a pair of formidable Gloriana class battleships formed the core of the defences, supported by two dozen cruisers and scores of frigates, while on the surface were

nine rebuilt regiments of the Nightwatch, ordinatus from the workshops of Triplex and four full Chapters of the First Legion. Ranged against them were six Chapters of the Night Lords, a sub-Legio deployment of the renegade Legio Victorum II and some 50,000 conscripts, abhumans and other auxilia troops pressed into service, with the Night Hunter himself at their head.

The formidable ships of the First Legion's fleet were swamped as the Night Lords armada burst from the Warp, their sheer numbers too great for them to be kept from orbit of Crucible. Unable to swiftly eliminate the powerful relic cruisers of the First Legion, the Night Lords instead began a combat drop even as their forward fleet elements engaged the Dark Angels ships, raining drop pods and landing craft into the skies. Only the ships of the White Scars hung back from the chaotic battle that erupted in orbit, perhaps worried that in the mass of duelling starships their unfamiliar markings would see them made targets by both of the other two Legions, or hesitant to sacrifice themselves as pawns for the Night Hunter's strategy. Descending through the storm of cannonfire that had erupted in orbit, the Night Lords entered the carefully-prepared defences of the First Legion, all arranged around the ruins of Crucible's fallen hive. Ingenious interlinked patterns of trenches and barricades funnelled attackers into killing zones pre-sighted for heavy weapons and artillery, while detachments of the Ravenwing stood by as a reserve force to plug gaps in the line. It was a flawless plan, but one that could not cope with the sheer wanton disregard for life that was key to the Night Lords' attack.

Made up of the entirety of the conscripted militia assets, the first wave of the assault was thrown directly into the strongest parts of the Dark Angels' lines, purposefully sacrificed to drain ammunition and distract the defenders. While these expendable assets were torn apart by the Dark Angels, the Night Lords landed and consolidated the bulk of their forces unmolested, a vast horde that thronged around the feet of the Battle Titans and far outnumbered the defenders. Even as the Traitor host began to marshal and divide as directed by the plan devised at Nergante, the Night Hunter broke from the main body, forcing ever-loyal Sevatar and his Atramentar to follow in his wake. The Night Hunter struck the Dark Angels' line like a thunderbolt, scattering resistance but failing to secure the breaches he created, each sealed by Dark Angels reserves as he roved the expanse of the battlefield in search of his brother, while Sevatar strove futilely to clear his path.

The chaos caused by the Night Hunter's unpredictable assault paved the way for the Night Lords' onslaught, with the Titans of the Legio Victorum II taking the lead, their great cannon blasting holes in the line and obliterating fortified bunkers with a single blast. At their feet, abhuman brutes and Night Lords heavy assault infantry surged forwards, met in turn by the swordsmen of the Deathwing, who refused to retreat despite the vast numbers of the foe. The line infantry of the First Legion made a disciplined withdrawal, firing by ranks as they moved to a second line of defence,

while Sagittar Ordinatus targeted the lead Titans. The Dark Angels were precise and immovable on defence, exploiting every opening in the disjointed attacks of their opponents, mounting counter-attacks to break the Night Lords' momentum at a moment's notice. Against any other foe, it would have been enough to stop them in their tracks, but against the Night Lords and the sheer numbers of their host it merely delayed the inevitable.

Even with the Night Hunter cutting a path through the Dark Angels' lines the Lion had not shown himself, and though they had demanded a high toll in lives it seemed that the First Legion would be broken that day. The Night Lords commanders exulted in their apparent victory. Leaving the Night Hunter to the fringes of the battle, they gathered for the final assault on the broken stub of the fallen spire's central pillar, where much of the surviving Dark Angels host had fallen back to. Each jealous of the others, they fell to bickering on the battlefield over the shares of the spoils and their retinues turned to fighting their own battles for the glory of their individual lords rather than that of the entire host. It was at this point that the Lion played his final trump card, the last strategy that offered him a hope of victory in the face of such odds: he unleashed the Excindio once more.

Yet, rather than set them loose upon the battlefield haphazardly, he had a specific task for the terrors of Old Night, he set them upon his brother, on Konrad Curze himself. Even seven such monsters could not defeat the Night Hunter, but they were enough to keep him at bay and occupied on the edge of the fighting, a flailing storm of destruction whose manic hate was a match for that of the Night Hunter. As those two forces of destruction met, the Lion finally revealed himself, striding forth at the head of the Deathwing Companions in their distinct bone-white armour. He fell upon the disorganised commanders of the Night Lords and set them to flight, those foolish enough to stand against the Lion fell before his blade and those that fled threw their warriors into confusion. It was a grand opening in the horde, one which the Dark Angels committed themselves to in their entirety, abandoning the fortification to the Nightwatch and surging forwards in the attack. The two sides met in a furious clash of arms, the Dark Angels few in number but focused and led by their Primarch, the Night Lords ill-disciplined but ferocious and many. For a moment the battle hung in the balance, victory but a hair's breadth away for both sides and neither willing to give an inch of ground. Then the White Scars committed themselves to the battle at last.

The ships of the Vth Legion moved into orbit, the hard-pressed craft of the Dark Angels could not oppose them and the Night Lords gave way before their advance, granting them access to dropzones over the heart of the fighting. At this point in the battle even a single Brotherhood would turn the tide in its favour, as was announced by the triumphant vox signals of the Night Lords captains in orbit, and the launch of their drop pods would mark the end of the battle and the start of the rout. The pale white pods smashed into the centre of the battle line, but what issued forth was a mix of white and black, all led by a warrior wielding a long Calibanite warblade. Zhenjin Khan led the Brotherhood of the Shattered Shield and the survivors of Sedricce into battle against the Night Lords and in orbit his cruisers opened fire on their erstwhile allies at point blank range. The battle ended, the sudden onslaught of the Saviour and his warriors throwing the Night Lords into chaos, followed by the renewed attack of the Lion, cutting down any that opposed him. The Night Lords abandoned their auxiliaries as they scrambled to evacuate, with Sevatar and Barbatos all but dragging the Night Hunter from the field as he screamed for his brother to face him. They chose to flee rather than seek a pyrrhic victory, abandoning the hope that had sustained the Dark Angels, saving the greater part of their numbers but ceding victory to the First Legion.

In the aftermath, amid a field of corpses and fire, Zhenjin Khan bent the knee before the Lion and offered him the Calibanite blade he bore and his life to atone for the mistake he had made. The Lion, ever pragmatic, looked down upon the warrior of the Vth, at his loyal warriors and the Dark Angels mixed in amongst them, each one on his knees, and uttered a simple judgement:

"Here in this moment I see neither Traitor nor Loyalist, only the living and the dead. The dead can beg neither mercy nor forgiveness, for now only history can judge them. The living must bear the weight of their choices and fight for them, and there is much fighting still to be done."





WHEN DREAMS BECOME NIGHTMARES

"On Caliban we hunted honest monsters, foul of both heart and hue, and we learned to show them no mercy or respite. While we now hunt monsters of a more treacherous breed, whose familiar guise hides the foulness of their hearts, those lessons we learned on Caliban still hold true and our blades remain sharp."

Corswain of the Dark Angels at the Battle of Crucible

The Slow March to Victory

The retreat from Crucible cost the Night Lords dearly, with only a quarter of those warriors sent into combat returning to their dropships. With both numbers and surprise now on the side of the Loyalists, and with the Night Hunter unable to intercede, the Dark Angels repaid the Traitors for the massacre at Isttvan V with a cold fury that the Night Lords could not match. There would be only one fate for those of the Traitors that did not flee the surface, for the Dark Angels had little mercy for unrepentant traitors, though many of those that failed to reach the escaping dropships took to the wild places of Crucible, forcing the Dark Angels to waste precious days hunting the last of them down. Despite this small boon granted by their comrades' bitter defiance, the Night Lords had few options left to them with so many of their number lying dead amid the rubble of Crucible's once-great hive spire. Where once they had been the supreme power, their numbers enough to counter the renowned skill at arms of the First Legion, now they found themselves reduced to the point where that advantage disappeared.

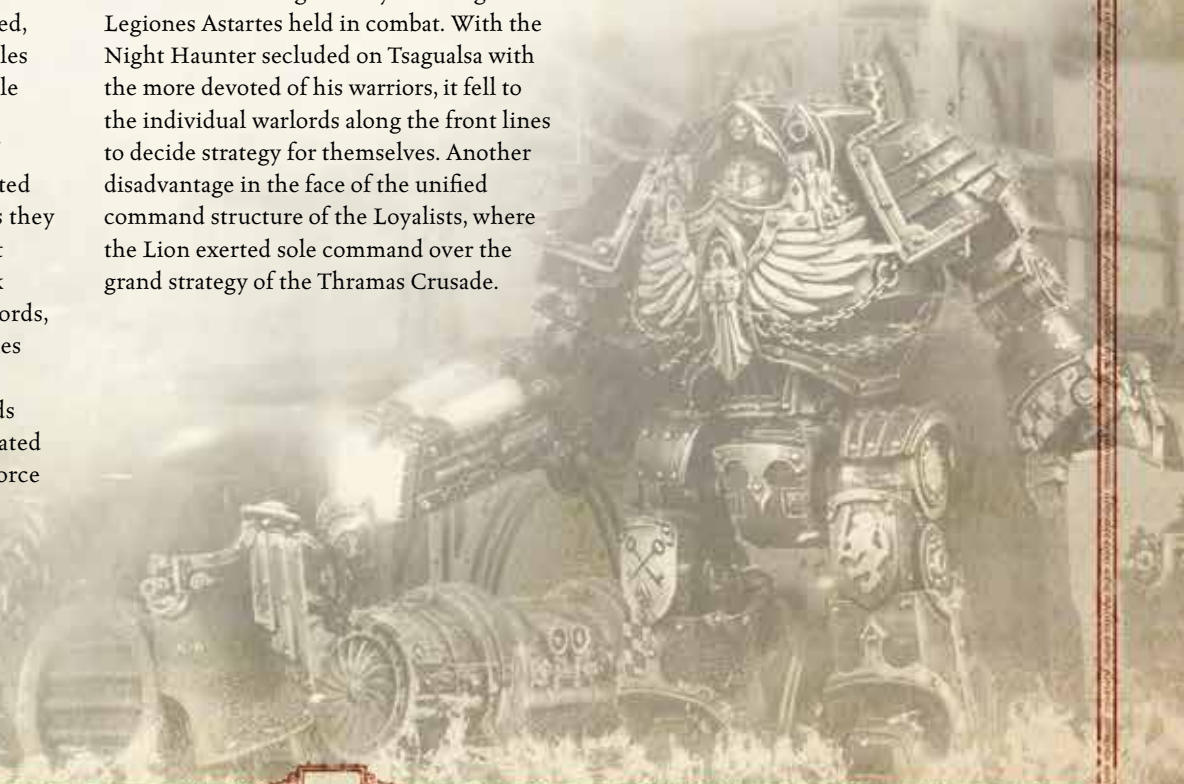
With the crucial confrontation on Crucible turned into a rout, those of the Night Lords engaged on other worlds along the front line quickly found themselves threatened. Their own reinforcements lay dead on Crucible and the main Dark Angels host was quick to dispatch warriors to those planets under attack. Where the Night Lords had expected one-sided massacres on ground they had thoroughly scouted, they now faced dangerously even battles on much wider battlegrounds, a gamble that they could ill-afford with a foe as capable as the First Legion. Several of the Night Lords warlords, seeing limited chances for glory or loot in the battles they fought, simply withdrew from combat without engaging the reinforced Dark Angels forces. On Yrdek the Night Lords, suddenly beset by three new companies of Dark Angels dropping from orbit, detonated the huge Loyalist minefields they had previously charted and retreated as waves of shrapnel and concussive force

spread like storms across the battlefield, but preserved the full combat strength of the forces still available to them. Some have seen the Night Lords' tactics as dishonourable or even cowardly, but seen in hindsight their actions kept the VIIIth Legion combat-capable amid what might well have been a complete disaster.

The Night Lords would succeed at withdrawing from their failed offensive and retain enough of their combat assets to continue to pose a threat to the Lion, with even the Night Hunter evading the vengeful First Legion fleet and returning to the half-built fortress on Tsagualsa where he fell once again into a morose fugue. However, freed from the constraints of fighting a foe whose skill at arms equalled their own, the Dark Angels and their allies switched flawlessly from staunch defence to all-out assault. The forces from the nearby Forge World of Tigrus opened a new front, attacking through the world of Verstun in the Aegis sector, whose conquest had slowed their arrival at Crucible. This assault on the Traitor worlds of the Aegis sector was a dire blow to the Traitor war effort, stripping them of yet another source of resources as the lords of Heraldor and Memlock turned the armies and the output of their factories to the defence of their own domain. The main force of the Lion's armies pressed further into the Thramas sector, the Night Lords fighting only where they could muster an advantage over their foes in the local system and abandoning their position to fall back when confronted by a force whose numbers negated any advantage the Legiones Astartes held in combat. With the Night Hunter secluded on Tsagualsa with the more devoted of his warriors, it fell to the individual warlords along the front lines to decide strategy for themselves. Another disadvantage in the face of the unified command structure of the Loyalists, where the Lion exerted sole command over the grand strategy of the Thramas Crusade.

The Witch of Thramas

The arrival of a badly damaged frigate from Thramas would instigate the next major confrontation, bringing news of Ulan Hûda's arrival at that vital Loyalist stronghold and the doom that had fallen upon it. Thramas itself still lay beyond the advancing lines of the Loyalist armies and within territory controlled by the Night Lords, mainly those warbands loyal to the Faceless Prince that had not been reduced in strength by the fighting at Crucible. The Lion refused to overextend his forces by committing to a major assault to break the lines and seize Thramas and, even were he willing, such an arduous struggle would never be resolved in time to aid that besieged world. Yet the Lion was unwilling to allow such an important resource to be destroyed without a fight, and so he gathered to him a select group of warriors to undertake an attack, bypassing the main lines to strike directly at Thramas. A full 1,000 Deathwing veterans, sworn to safeguard their Primarch no matter the cost and taken from the remains of several companies shattered during the fighting on Crucible, formed the core of his force, augmented by the remaining strength of the Crimson Lion Chapter and Praetor Corswain, who won a place at the Lion's side by means of his singular valour and skill at arms. Added to this strength were the surviving warriors of the White Scars, volunteered by Zhenjin Khan who had sworn a mighty and binding oath that he and his Brotherhood would redeem themselves in battle or in death, and



expunge the taint of the Traitor from their record. A wedge of black and white cruisers headed by the battleship, *Invincible Reason*, they plunged into the Warp, a perilous course set through the warp storms that surrounded Thramas, a risk dictated by need, for they had not the time to avoid the vast morass of aetheric eddies and vortices that plagued that area of space.

Two ships, the *Pale Horseman* and the *Azure Bolt*, were destroyed during this treacherous passage through the depths of the Warp. The first torn apart by the tumultuous storms that sprang up without warning and the other simply lost, vanished into the endless vaults of aetheric space without a trace. The remaining ships, though most sustained at least minor damage during the crossing, survived to breach the Warp less than a week after they had departed, a fractured but determined stone cast into a pool already in turmoil. For Thramas now stood on the very edge of destruction, the vast shadow of Ulan Hûda lay upon the ancient capital of the Eastern Fringe and the loathsome mass of the predator-forge alone caused untold damage to Thramas' surface as it crept into position to begin its feast. The various orbital planes of Thramas were crowded with the floating hulks of broken ships and the battered squadrons of those that still fought;

the surviving ships of the Thramassi fleet and armed chartist craft matched against the warships of Nostramo and the scrap-barques of Ulan Hûda. It was a vision of madness, a hell of spinning debris dominated by the bloated terror of the predator-forge and lit by the actinic flare of hundreds of lance batteries and the death throes of great cruisers, a battlefield devoid of tactics or strategy where only slaughter and death remained. No subtle trick or clever ploy could avert the doom poised in high orbit over Thramas, only an act of suicidal valour would stay the advance of Ulan Hûda.

The Lion did not hesitate and the *Invincible Reason*'s cannon roared their defiance as the ancient ship powered forward into the fray, the other ships of the squadron taking up positions at its side. Sweeping through the battlefield the Lion made no attempt to engage the Night Lords or Dark Mechanicum craft in protracted battle, but instead used the combined firepower of his ships to blast open a path to the looming bulk of the moon of Ulan Hûda. The moon, though small when compared to a planet like Thramas, was still vast beyond imagining to the ships that now challenged it, the layers of manufactoria, forge halls and engine-vaults a skin of armour many kilometres thick and all studded with innumerable

The Price of Failure

Six reinforced Chapters of the Night Lords, perhaps 12,000 warriors in all, dropped on the surface of Crucible alongside 50,000 auxillia and 18 Titans of the Legio Victorum I. Only a fraction of these forces would escape the surface intact, and of those that escaped many would not be able to fight free of the system. For the conscripts and abhuman troops, whose bulk landers were woefully incapable of rapid exfiltration under combat conditions, almost none survived. Most perished in battle or whilst attempting to flee the Dark Angels' counter-attack, with less than 5,000 leaving the system alive, and most of these being reserve troops not yet deployed from their landing craft. Of the Legio Victorum I, the Foe Slayers, none of the Titans deployed into combat would leave Crucible, several falling to concentrated fire from Loyalist ordinatus platforms and the others to the Titans of the Legio Solaria. The princes of the Imperial Hunters rushed headlong into combat, taking serious damage in their determination to reach and engage the Traitor Titans, their zeal ensuring that none of the Traitors left the surface alive. The Night Lords fared better than their allies, their drop craft well capable of retrieving them even under heavy fire, and with some elite formations even able to evacuate by means of teleportarium chambers on the orbiting ships. Even so, one-in-three of those committed to the battle would not return, with particularly heavy casualties among the Atramentar and the retinue of Barbatos as they struggled to shield their Primarch as he was convinced to withdraw.

When added to the casualties incurred on other battlefields that would collapse in the wake of the defeat on Crucible, the defection of the White Scars and the arrival of new troops from Tigrus, the campaign in Thramas underwent a dramatic shift. Where once the Traitors had dominated the battles through sheer numbers, now they found themselves on the receiving end of this same disparity.





++THE CROSSROADS OF THE EAST++

++Circa 010.M31/Coreward Quadrants, Thramas Sector/ Rimward Quadrants, Aegis Sector++



weapons emplacements. The Lion could not hope to destroy or deter it with a simple bombardment, and instead, as was his wont, forsook any attempt at subtlety and took to the field in person to press the attack.

Rather than a storm of las beams and shells, it was one of drop pods and assault craft that fell upon the surface of Ulan Hûda, while the capital ships held their distance and lent their firepower to the orbital battle around them under the command of Corswain. Impacting on the surface, the forces of the Dark Angels and White Scars found themselves immediately under assault by the hideous flesh-drones and lacrymosan thralls that composed Ulan Hûda's foul armies, a tidal wave of debased and befouled flesh wedded to forbidden technology. Led by the Lion, the Loyalist forces pressed into the thick of it, leaving the White Scars and Zhenjin Khan to guard their extraction zone. They waged a vicious war amid the tangled confines of Ulan Hûda's forge works, its halls and passageways arranged in a maddeningly labyrinthine pattern. Here they would come face-to-face with the architect of the insane creation that was Ulan Hûda, the creature that history would come to call the 'Witch of Thramas' – a dark magos of the Mechanicum ancient

beyond easy reckoning and now little more than desiccated organs held within a huge and terrifying metal shell. This creature, caught in a mechanical purgatory that was neither truly alive nor fully deceased, controlled the hordes of flesh-thralls with a chilling and dispassionate logic, sacrificing dozens of her constructs to bring down a single Dark Angels veteran without compunction.

The grim neural-impulses of the Witch of Thramas drove her thralls and servant magi into a frenzy, thousands upon thousands of them descending on the isolated Legiones Astartes landing force in an endless throng of blades. Even led by the Lion, the Space Marines found themselves mired in a frantic melee that stretched across the vast surface of Ulan Hûda. Separating into smaller forces to capitalise on their skills and split the enemy horde, the Legiones Astartes stormed cannon-bunkers and forge halls, destroying them with melta charges and moving on to new objectives. Yet, despite the damage they inflicted, it was little more than a pinprick to the vast predator-moon, a trifling matter that would not slow its advance or stay its assault on Thramas. For though the Lion and his sons demolished dozens of the huge cutting beam emitters, hundreds more remained and

were slowly building charge to slice open the planet below and render its cities and stony flesh into food for the forges of Ulan Hûda. In orbit, the Faceless Prince, Nakrid Thole, set his ships against those commanded by Corswain, determined that nothing should stay his revenge on Thramas and denying the Dark Angels commander the chance to aid his comrades on the surface.

Every moment of fighting saw the death of hundreds of the Dark Mechanicum drones, but also of a handful of the Legiones Astartes, and the warriors that followed the Lion could ill-afford casualties. Sensing weakness, the Witch of Thramas let loose the most powerful of her minions, hoarded and preserved for just such an opening. Led by the Witch herself, a mass of hulking Errax automata, debased and ferocious killing machines with claws that could shear through power armour, threw themselves into the battle. Met head on by the Lion and the warriors of the Deathwing Companions the assault was blunted, scything steel claws countered by Calibanite blades, but it had immobilised the Dark Angels, pinning them in place and leaving them unable to continue their campaign of sabotage. Yet Zhenjin Khan had not been idle while the Lion battled, for the renowned scouts of the White



Scars had discovered a series of unstable generators buried deep beneath the surface and heavily guarded by massive automata sentinels. A single short vox message announced the intention of the Saviour, transmitted in the clear to the Dark Angels as they fought for their lives, "Evacuate now, our debts are paid in full".

The White Scars abandoned the landing zones to assault the deep generators in full force, tearing into the ranks of its automata defenders with a suicidal fury. They made no attempt to clear out the foe or capture ground, trading their lives to close upon the vast underground reactors in vicious firefights in the pitch-black labyrinth beneath Ulan Hûda. None can know what feats of bravery and skill were wrought in that assault, a battered handful of desperate warriors clad in the white of the Great Khan's Legion pitted against a seething horde of machine horrors, but it is a feat not many could have equalled even amongst the Legiones Astartes. Those few survivors that managed to reach the central generator cores, ragged and bloody from battle, detonated the melta-charges they had borne through that dark hell, setting off a chain of devastating explosions within Ulan Hûda's hidden heart. Several of the Dark Angels

that fought far above on the surface claim to have caught fragments of a last transmission bearing the code-stamp of the Saviour himself and badly distorted by the radiation of the blast. All that could be deciphered after the battle was a short segment that read, 'Tell the Khan we...'

On the surface above, systems began to cut out all across the moon as its surface bucked and shook from the force of the Saviour's fury; the Witch and her minions were thrown into chaos by the failure of key noosphere interlinks while the Dark Angels cut a path through the horde towards one of the vast spires that sprouted from its surface. More than a match for any ordinary warrior, the Witch of Thramas tore apart those of the First Legion that challenged her, the huge claws of her war-armature strong enough to shear apart ceramite with ease and its armour proof against all but the most powerful of weapons. The swordsmanship of the Dark Angels champions was meaningless in the face of such brute strength and their bolter fire futile despite the marksmanship of the warriors of the First Legion. Even the firepower of the Dark Angels Dreadnoughts and specialist fire teams was in vain, tearing holes in the baroque chassis of the Witch but unable to strike any critical components concealed at the heart of that huge bio-mechanical terror. It seemed that here at the moment of their victory the First Legion would be denied escape, trapped upon the failing forge-moon as it tore itself apart and granted only an ignominious death as reward for their heroism.

There, at the edge of disaster, the Lion joined the battle, his ire awoken by the slaughter of his sons and the sacrifice of loyal warriors of the Emperor. He fell upon the Witch of Thramas with the implacable force of an avalanche and met the inhuman strength of her war-throne with the faultless skill of his sword arm. For a span of long moments they stood matched at the heart of the battle, neither giving ground as the perverted artifice of the Mechanicum strained against the gene-craft of the Emperor, claws shearing chips from the Lion's armour even as the Primarch's blade cut new wounds in her adamantium hide.

Yet, in the end the Witch could not stand against the Lion, and he cut her in two with a sweep of his blade, severing the upper torso which scuttled away like a great spider of metal and spite. Freed from the stalemate of battle, the Dark Angels stormed the tower and scattered the metal hordes of Ulan Hûda that stood in their path. The surviving Loyalists summoned their shuttles and gunships and fled the surface, trusting to the last sacrifice of Zhenjin Khan. As they boosted towards their ships, the metal skin of Ulan Hûda behind them buckled and shifted then erupted in a huge gout of flame that tore a hole kilometres across from the surface of the moon, scattering debris across orbital space and consuming the brave warriors of the White Scars in an instant. The grievously-wounded moon, trailing burning gas and the broken shards of its halls, was enveloped in a pall of crawling lightning as it clawed upon the veil of realspace, opening a portal to the Warp and fleeing Thramas, leaving the shattered and blasted planet in the hands of the Loyalists.

Yet, the victory would prove cold comfort for the broken denizens of Thramas and the Dark Angels alike. For between the hunger of Ulan Hûda and the fury of the Dark Angels' counter-assault, there was little left of that proud world but ruins, few of its towering hive spires still capable of sheltering the surviving people from the harsh weather of Thramas and the storms of fiery debris that would rain down upon its surface for months. Despite their salvation from the forces of the Warmaster and the clutches of the predator-forge, there remained little for the people of Thramas to celebrate, for the price of their salvation was almost as grim as the fate they had avoided. Some amongst them even whispered that perhaps the mercy of the Lion was as terrible as the anger of the Night Haunter, that neither of those towering lords of battle cared for the carnage they caused – only for the war itself, the never-ending conflict for which the Primarchs had been bred.

Savage Weapons

The battle at Thramas marked the beginning of the second year of the Thramas Crusade, and while the Dark Angels had seized the initiative, they had yet to completely eliminate the foe. The Traitors still controlled many worlds within the Thramas sector and almost the entirety of the Aegis sector. Only the area of space around Gulgorahd remained largely clear of their influence, many of the Bastion worlds still holding on in grim defiance of the enormous destruction wrought upon them by the Traitors' long siege. Indeed, with the Night Lords now under heavy pressure from the Dark Angels along the Thramas front and the slow but steady advance of the forces from Tigrus along the Verstun front, the vast armies that had once surrounded Gulgorahd had fallen back to engage the Dark Angels. The sudden appearance of fresh forces allowed the Night Lords to retake Yaelis, but in turn the advance of the legions of Gulgorahd saw the fall of Parthac, whose surface would be stripped clean of resources to fuel the depleted forges of Gulgorahd.

Both sides were approaching exhaustion, with much of the once-powerful industrial base of the Eastern Fringe in ruins and its population centres decimated, and the pace of the fighting began to slow. Governors, militia commanders and petty warlords across the Eastern Fringe looked upon the ruin that had been wrought about them by

the warring Legiones Astartes and by their own hands, wondering what would remain when one side finally declared victory. The citizens of the Imperium looked upon the post-human warriors they had once thought of as heroes and liberators and saw only weapons bereft of a strong hand to guide their impact. True panic began to take its grip upon the worlds of the Eastern Fringe, with many of those on the border worlds taking to the desolate places of their homes and hoping to hide, and those on the populous hubs of the sector taking to ships so that they might flee. Order began to break down, many planets falling silent as food shipments failed to arrive or as xenos raiders fell upon them. The empire that was being so fiercely fought for was slowly unravelling.

On Tsagualsa, where the bones of a new fortress and stronghold for his Legion had begun to take shape, the Night Haunter brooded and plotted. His interest in the strategic goals of Horus' campaign was long forgotten, replaced by an insane desire to face his brother, the Lion, and force a confrontation that might alter his fate. He paid no heed to the disposition of his Legion or that of his allies, but instead set into motion a plan of his own, born from the fevered imaginings of his nightmares. He summoned Sevar, Sheng, Barbatos and those others of his Legion that he favoured and bid them send out a message in his name, a message for his brother and his Dark Angels. He called

upon them to meet him at Tsagualsa, a world that had remained hidden from the Dark Angels prior to this point, baiting the Lion with the hope of settling the war between the two Primarchs and sparing their Legions the slow death of unending warfare among the stars of the Eastern Fringe. A war that had already spanned two long years, where to hold a handful of worlds had cost the lives of many thousands of his own sons and uncounted millions of unaugmented soldiers and civilians. If the war continued, the tally of the dead would only grow until the First Legion no longer had the numbers to aid in the final battle for Terra. So, when Curze called upon his brother it was a call the Lion could not refuse, even though he knew that it must be a trap, but it was a trap that he must spring for the sake of his Legion and the Imperium.

The war remained balanced on the edge of a blade, with the recent victory at Thramas finally offering the advantage to the Loyalist forces, an advantage that could be easily snatched from them by ill fortune. As such, the Lion could not afford to pull a large force from the line to accompany him without risking the fall of more worlds, which he may have assumed was the goal of Curze's plan all along. Instead he selected a single Chapter to stand at his side, a force large enough to fight free of a trap, but not so large as to endanger the wider war that still raged unabated across the Eastern Fringe. The co-ordinates provided by the message placed Tsagualsa at the southernmost edge of the Nostramo sector, well within the bounds of territory controlled by the Traitor forces; here anything less than the entire First Legion fleet would not be enough to break through by force and such a major confrontation was ill-advised. Just as he had elected to bring but a single Chapter as his honour guard, the Lion took with him a squadron of his swiftest ships, rigged for a long journey in the depths of the Warp, leaving behind the battleship *Invincible Reason*. Speed and subtlety would stand the Dark Angels in better stead than bluster or brute force, and, unlike some of their brother Legions, the First Legion was more than capable of adopting a tactical stance appropriate to the needs of the moment.

With the Warp stirred to restless turmoil by the rituals of the Word Bearers at Calth, even the expert navigators of the First Legion had difficulty plotting a course full across the sector. While they managed

The Knight and the Warlord

While the Lion fought upon the surface of Ulan Hûda, Corswain confronted the Faceless Prince in orbit. Commanding the *Invincible Reason* in his master's stead, Corswain and a handful of supporting cruisers held off the massed frigates and assault craft of the Night Lords, sworn to protect the Dark Angels on the surface at any cost. Over the course of the battle, his few ships would amass a dozen ship-kills for a loss of only three of their own number: the *Ardent Knight* falling to the torpedoes of the Night Lords bombardment cruiser *Eldritch Sign*, the *Pride of Gramarye* destroyed as it rammed the grand cruiser *Endless Night* and the *Warspite* crippled after being struck by debris from the wounding of Ulan Hûda.

At the height of the battle, the *Invincible Reason* was boarded by the Faceless Prince himself, and the two commanders met in combat. The duel they fought was brief, for while Thole was a skilled swordsman he could not match the honed skill of Corswain, resorting instead to foul play to even the odds between them. Severing a nearby conduit, the Night Lords commander bathed the hallway in which they fought in searing plasma, killing a number of his own warriors, breaching Corswain's ornate battle plate and leaving his sword arm burned and useless. Despite his wounds, Corswain, trained to fight with either hand to equal ability, held off the Faceless Prince until Ulan Hûda's fall, forcing him to retreat in shame once again.



to avoid the loss of any ships, the entire squadron was scattered and dispersed. Aboard the strike cruiser *Vehemence*, the Lion was the first to breach the Warp at the edge of the system where Tsagualsa could be found, an otherwise unremarkable world whose drab and lifeless terrain made no impression of strategic value. Yet on the

surface could be seen the beginnings of the Night Haunter's baroque new fortress and in orbit on the far side of the planet lurked a small fleet of Night Lords craft. Waiting on the outskirts of the system the Dark Angels ships slowly regrouped, the remaining craft dropping from the Warp one by one until they matched the

numbers of the foe. Hours had passed as the Lion's fleet assembled, yet the Night Lords neither approached nor targeted the Loyalist ships. Indeed, as they approached the barren world in combat formation they received a brief hail, inviting the Lion to meet his brother on the surface.

His warriors in standby aboard the cruisers above, waiting at their gunships and drop pods for the ambush they all knew must be coming, the Lion teleported to the surface with only two warriors as his honour guard. Alajos, Praetor of the Ninth, and Corswain would bear witness to the meeting of the two brothers on the surface of Tsagualsa, the first time they had come face to face since the beginning of the Horus Heresy. There, amid the foundations of his new, macabre stronghold, Curze taunted his brother with the fragments of truth his dreams had made known to him, with the plans of Horus and the lies he knew would wound the Lion's pride the most deeply. He baited and cursed all in order to coax his brother to violence, to force his future onto a new path that would avoid the fate he feared was his destiny. He fought with the one weapon he knew that the Lion would not expect from his dark brother: the truth.

"We are savage weapons, one and all, too dangerous to be wielded without cost. That is all history will see of us. Even you Lion. Even you."

All those present had expected the meeting to end in violence, that it would see the two Primarchs cross blades and draw their Legions into the fight, but only Curze had expected that it would be the Lion who would strike first. With the Lion's sudden fury the battle was begun, and once started it quickly spread. At first the two Primarchs struggled alone then their honour guards drew blood and within the space of a few short minutes, drop pods and attack ships rained down upon the planet as full scale conflict erupted.

This would be no ordered and composed battle, no carefully planned engagement with objectives and strategies, but a sprawling brawl. A mindless melee powered by blind hatred and fury where neither side made any attempt at formations or battle lines, but simply charged forwards to grapple and blast at the foe at point blank range. At its heart the two Primarchs fought until they were awash in each other's blood, both screaming curses and exchanging blows with equal viciousness, their differences masked with gore and the rage that twisted their features. The only cause or objective on Tsagualsa was death and the fighting did not relent, continuing long past the exhaustion of munitions and long past any rational casualty level.

In the end, the sons of Konrad Curze dragged him bodily from the field, the Night Haunter's wounds were so grave he could do little more than scream insults as the Night Lords struggled to hold back the Lion, for even cut to the bone the Primarch of the First Legion was a fearsome opponent. This was no victory for the Dark Angels though, for the Chapter that had followed the enraged Lion into battle was a shadow of its former numbers, and as more Night Lords ships arrived in the system they in turn were forced to flee. It had been a savage battle fought by savage weapons, Curze's insults lodged now in the mind of the Lion like cruel barbs, for in the end they had been proven more similar than they were different, the titles Loyalist and Traitor had counted for nothing.

The Spite of Devils

While the battle at Tsagualsa had driven a splinter of doubt into the Lion's mind, it had altered neither the state of the war nor the destruction being wrought upon the Eastern Fringe. Worse, with his final gambit wasted and failed, the Night Haunter could now see only one path ahead of him, a future he dreaded more than anything else, but one he now saw no way to avoid. The demons he had struggled with since he had left Nostramo took hold of him and the last vestiges of honour and reason fell away from the Night Lords. While the Traitor lords of Heraldor, Memlock and other strongholds across the Eastern Fringe still fought a war to claim these stars for the Warmaster, the Night Haunter and the most debased of his warriors fought only for the brief distraction that death and blood brought them. There would be no more attempts to take or hold ground for them, just killing and destruction and the Warmaster be damned.

By contrast, the Loyalists found their ranks swelled with those regiments of the Nightwatch once pinned in place by the siege of Thramas, and with its relief they gained the ability to control a far larger spread of territory. Captain-general Morhde set the serried regiments of Thramas on the attack, leaving the defence of many planets to the ranks of the Imperialis Militia in order to press the conscript armies of the Traitor Aegis sector, desperate to put an end to the war before it utterly ruined the home he fought for. Catching that wide expanse of worlds between Tigrus to the south-west, Gulgorahd to the north and the Thramassi Nightwatch to the east, the Loyalist regiments pressed home



their attack. The Dark Angels were the tip of the spear that struck the Traitors in their open flank, striking at the strongest opposition and the most fortified strongholds, ever searching for the sons of the Night Haunter that they might settle their grudge in honest and open battle. Yet even as they conquered and bled, the Dark Angels found little trace of the Night Lords, encountering only scattered bands and small groups of reavers that gave them little satisfaction in battle.

The fall of Memlock, one of the chief strongholds of the Traitor forces in the Aegis sector, preserved against the chaos overtaking the Eastern Fringe, saw one of the few confrontations between the two Legions in this last stage of the crusade. There a full Chapter of the Night Lords, under Anrek Barbatos, stood sentinel over the nine-tiered fortress of Memlock, overseeing the transfer of materials and conscripts to Tsagualsa and the new stronghold of the Night Lords that was being built. Ever a stalwart of the old Legion and its Terran origins, Barbatos had resisted the madness that gripped much of his Legion and deplored the long decline of his Primarch. To Barbatos and those that still followed him, it seemed right that they make a stand in the ruins of the empire they had sought to build, and when the Dark Angels came they did not run. For seven weeks Barbatos, his warriors and a dozen conscript regiments held the massed might of the Thramassi Nightwatch and three Chapters of the Dark Angels at bay, falling only when the Lion himself brought another 1,000 of his black-armoured killers to the fray. It is a legend of the First Legion that one of the scars on the Lion's armour is from Barbatos' blade, a last memento of a warrior that chose to face his end bravely.

The remainder of the Night Lords had no intention of granting the First Legion any satisfaction, to the Nostraman warriors there was little value in a brave but futile death when they could hurt their opponent in other ways. The scattered warbands of the VIIIth Legion moved from world to world, burning and killing where they found only

the weak or the vulnerable, and poisoning worlds from orbit where their defences were too strong for a traditional assault. Unlike their previous onslaught this was no attempt to build small empires or to spread that favoured weapon of the Night Lords, fear, but instead a scorched earth campaign was undertaken. What they could not keep they would destroy, the Eastern Fringe would burn to satisfy their spite and anger. Where they encountered the First Legion in numbers enough to trouble them they withdrew, whenever the Lion managed to corner them they withdrew. They gave the First Legion no chance for a decisive battle and no pause to regroup. Denied an escape from his nightmares, Curze granted the Eastern Fringe a chance to see what it was that haunted him, to bring despair to his noble brother and work upon the doubt that had lodged within him at Tsagualsa. No longer was the Thramas Crusade a battle to control the Eastern Fringe, it had become its death.

Regret and Desolation

The once-rich worlds of the Eastern Fringe, already devastated by more than two years of constant war and battle, were ruined by the new pace of the conflict. The last semblances of stellar civilisation fell away and left only barbarism and madness behind, and such small concepts as Loyalist and Traitor began to lose their meaning. The Night Lords descended wherever they could find weakness or the smallest gap in the Loyalists' lines, their ships apparently uninhibited by the worsening warp storms that spread out from Ultramar to encompass Thramas. Where they appeared, there were no glorious battles or defiant last stands, only a brutal slaughter of anyone that the Legion chose not to enslave. Everything of worth on those worlds they marked was taken aboard the dark ships of the VIIIth Legion, and what they could not claim they destroyed, burning cities and herding entire populations into the skinning pits. When they left, there remained nothing of value, only scorched ruins and the bleached bones of those deemed unworthy to slave in the bowels of the Night Lords fleet until they died. It was a policy that hurt the Night Lords almost as much as it crippled the Dark Angels, denying both sides any safe port in the madness of war and leaving them few havens to repair and resupply the battered Legions that prosecuted the crusade.

Still tormented by the Night Haunter's words on Tsagualsa and barely recovered from the grievous injuries inflicted upon

him, the Lion began a grim new strategy of his own. On his orders, those worlds that could not be fully safeguarded from the Night Lords' depredations were razed to the ground to ensure that no succour or profit could be gleaned from them. Those few of the lesser worlds that had escaped the ravages of the Night Lords fell to the Dark Angels, whose own rampage caused as much destruction as that of the Night Lords. Munitions and warriors were spared the scorched earth policy and consolidated on those major worlds deemed worth defending by the First Legion. Those smaller colonies or minor forges whose resources were too meagre to warrant a garrison – for to defend every single outpost was beyond the manpower that remained to the Loyalists – were stripped bare and their people forced to relocate as their old homes burned. It was as pragmatically logical as it was cruel, and the inhabitants of Thramas watched as those they once hailed as the heroes of the Great Crusade tore the Eastern Fringe apart.

For all its spite, the Dark Angels' new strategy proved only marginally effective. For while the larger strongholds of the Loyalists were now all but impregnable to the Night Haunter's legions, heavily guarded and fortified, the Night Lords remained a threat that could not be pinned down or brought to battle where they might be broken. Worse still, they had completed what the Night Lords had begun, the systematic destruction of the communication and infrastructure links that had held the Eastern Fringe together. The warp storms that had engulfed the Imperium grew steadily worse, the name 'Ruinstorm' spreading across the sectors with every tale of a ship lost in transit, but such woes seemed not to affect those sworn to the Warmaster. Moving slowly and in great numbers, the Loyalists weathered the storms, striking at Traitor strongholds where they found them and bringing much of the Aegis sector to heel at last, but always the Night Lords evaded them. Though they wielded superior numbers and resources, the Dark Angels could not end the war while the Night Lords still roamed free.

In the midst of this turmoil, with the Eastern Fringe crumbling around him, Lion El'Jonson suddenly gathered 30,000 of his warriors and without explanation departed the Eastern Fringe for an unknown location. With such a large portion of the Dark Angels' strength and many of its greatest leaders absent, the Night Lords went on the offensive for the first time in months. All across the Eastern Fringe they struck at the remaining Dark Angels garrisons,

largely ignoring the less well-defended worlds held by the Solar Auxilia and Imperialis Militia, bleeding them and taking many trophies but failing to unseat the well-entrenched defenders. Only one Loyalist stronghold would fall to the talons of the Night Haunter's sons and then only briefly, but it was a bitter loss for the Dark Angels to bear. Thramas, stripped of its Dark Angels garrison when the Lion vanished, was unprepared for the onslaught of Nakrid Thole and the 10,000 warriors at his back. The defences ruined in the onslaught of Ulan Hûda had never been fully repaired and many of the regiments once pledged to its defence were spread across the stars prosecuting the Lion's crusade, the Star of the East fell within hours of bitter but one-sided battle. Only the palace of the Regent held, the Midnight Host and their power axes kept the Night Lords at bay in the close confines of the palace, spending their lives to guard not the throne room but the sanctum of the world's Astropathic choir.

Obsessed with the complete destruction of Thramas, Nakrid Thole refused to withdraw until its last fastnesses had been overthrown and its surface utterly razed. His warriors spent days tormenting and butchering the few people of Thramas that still clung to their home world, parading their broken corpses before the Regent's palace where the Regent and the Midnight Host still held. In his arrogance, Thole gave little thought to anything but his revenge, and when the Warp opened again after seven long days spent tormenting the Regent and her bodyguards, he found himself in a trap of his own making.

Emerging from the Warp was a Dark Angels fleet gathered over the long days of Thramas' torment so they might be able to strike a blow against the Legion that had so far avoided their fury. Commanded by the Eskaton Marduk Sedras, their goal was not the relief of Thramas or the rescue of its people, but the utter destruction of the Night Lords host present on that world. In the face of the far larger Dark Angels fleet, its relic void craft more than a match in open battle for the Night Lords craft, the Faceless Prince's vessel stood little chance of victory, but their warlord refused to order a withdrawal while the Regent of Thramas still lived. Even as the ships above staged a short battle for orbital supremacy before abandoning the hopeless struggle, Nakrid Thole led his men in an assault on the palace.

Having seized orbital space above Thramas, the ships of the Dark Angels rained fire down upon it, the Eskaton concluding that what little remained after the Night Lords, rampage was little worth risking the lives of his warriors to save. Phosphex and lance beam reduced the once proud spires of Thramas to rubble, killing many of the Night Lords that still hunted through the hive city and obliterating the few surviving citizens. When the Eskaton and the grim warriors of the Dreadwing finally set foot upon the surface after three hours of bombardment they found little that still resembled a city, just twisted metal and melted ferrocrete warped into shapes that seemed alien and strange. There, among the burning rain and bleached bones

of a loyal world, they hunted the last of the Night Lords, the dark blue plate once worn so proudly by the Night Haunter's warriors twisted into something demonic by the heat and destruction. Thole himself, found alone in the Regent's heavily-shielded palace, died in battle with Eskaton Marduk, and a legend within the First Legion claims that he died with the Regent's bleached skull fixed on his armour and a bitter smile on his face.

The Dark Angels declared the battle a victory, for the Night Lords had suffered a major loss of troops as a result of their actions, but it was a victory that rang hollow. Thramas had been the capital of the Eastern Fringe, one of its most prosperous worlds and a bastion of the Great Crusade, and now it was ruins. Brought low not by the hand of the Warmaster or the madness of Curze but by the pragmatic logic of the First Legion, the warriors that represented the Emperor and the Imperium He had built. This was the first glimpse of the true face of the Horus Heresy, a war of hatred and brutality that was no longer about who would control the ruins of the Imperium, but which had become an exercise in genocide. Thramas was a symbol of what the Horus Heresy held in store for the Eastern Fringe, a quiet death in the shadow of grappling post-human siblings with neither hero nor villain to be found. The death of Thramas did not tilt the balance of the war, the Night Lords remained a dire threat to the Loyalists despite their losses, and it seemed the killing would go on until nothing remained in the segmentum but corpses and ruins. Then, the Lion returned from Perditus.

The Forbidden Battle

Almost nothing is known of the Lion's expedition to the system referred to only as Perditus, 'Forbidden' – 30,000 Dark Angels left alongside their Primarch, but far fewer would return. Who it was that the Lion fought is not known, though rumours would have us believe that his was not the only Legion present in that remote system, and what his objective might have been is a secret still held close by the Dark Angels long after the end of the Horus Heresy. The only thing that is known for certain is that the Lion brought something back with him from that forbidden place.

Referred to within the First Legion simply as the 'Gatekeeper' or the 'Key', the prize that Lion El'Jonson brought back from Perditus allowed him to circumvent the great storms that had swept across much of the galaxy. It was the key to winning the Thramas Crusade once and for all, and none questioned such a tool nor the secrecy that surrounded it. The great and the mighty that oversaw the war agreed that such a prize was worth the sacrifice of Thramas and any number of other worlds, for it allowed them to punish the Traitors and strike at their fleets with impunity. The Lion, when he spoke of such things at all, named it a necessary evil, a tool that was to be wielded as was required and then put aside. One single record, hidden deep within the vaults of Terra, in the warded racks that maintain those tomes dedicated to the study of the psyarkane, gives this tool a name, one that bears a grim aspect. It calls it 'Tuchulcha, the servant of the Deadly Seas'. It names it 'Daemon'.

Desperation cuts Keenly

From the moment of the Lion's return, the war began to change. Where before the Dark Angels had groped blindly through the Warp, travelling only with difficulty and unable to pin down their foe, now they moved with a speed that the Night Lords had ill-expected. The First Legion had been granted a weapon that allowed them to bypass the storms that isolated much of the Eastern Fringe. This new weapon, added to their arsenal at Perditus by the hand of the Lion himself, would be the key to victory in the Thramas Crusade. For that key to work there would need to be a lock, a critical point where it could be wielded to maximum effect. The Dark Angels were running out of time, they could ill-afford another three years of war in the east with Horus pressing on Terra and disturbing rumours seeping out of war-torn Ultramar. They needed a decisive battle, a field on which to break the Night Lords and end the war once and for all.



DARK ANGELS TERMINATOR CENOBITE

CENOBITE ASTILAEUS, THE ORDER OF THE EMPTY SKY, SECOND BATTLE OF THRAMAS

Deployed as part of the landing force that would eradicate the Night Lords' presence in the ruins of Thramas, Cenobite Astilaeus and the other members of his cenobium made the specialised skills of the Order of the Empty Sky available to the Dark Angels' spearhead and were experts in the prosecution of close-quarters battle in conjunction with lethalis category artillery support, exploiting the chaos of lethalis category fire support as shells burst in the very midst of their assault. It was a tradition that had begun on Caliban, with the heavily armoured knights fighting even while their serfs and armsmen showered the field with shafts and shot from primitive projectile weaponry, and many of its adherents were of Calibanite stock. The heavy Cataphracti Terminator armour granted them by the Lion as part of his vaunted First Legion, allowed them to weather the storm of shrapnel and flame produced by the terrible weapons of the Great Crusade with limited risk and bring the fury of their assault into the heart of enemy formations that were cowering in the face of the artillery's fury.





Creating such a field would be the challenge, for the Night Lords operated in scattered raiding fleets and rarely gathered in force. Their anchorage point had been discovered in data retrieved from the wrecks of ships destroyed over Thramas, a hidden facility above one of the outer worlds of the ruined Sheol system, which had been abandoned almost a year ago and deemed dead by the Loyalists. Yet, to act on this information would render it useless, for once the Night Lords realised their base was compromised, they would abandon it as they had done others and the war would go on. For there to be a single great battle, the Dark Angels would need to create it whole cloth. The first stage in the Lion's plan to achieve this was the destruction and harrying of the Night Lords fleets, leaving the conduct of the wider war to the surviving Nightwatch regiments and the lords of Gulgorahd. Gathering the might of his Legion's vessels to him, the Lion waited and watched. When his allies reported the appearance of a Night Lords fleet in-system, he used his new weapon to bring his entire fleet to bear upon them, crushing those that tried to fight and letting flee those that choose to run. Within the space of a few months, after eight separate Night Lords flotillas had been scattered, the Night Lords had all but withdrawn from combat, choosing to hide and wait for the tide to turn once again.

The second stage of the Lion's plan was to provide the lords of Gulgorahd with the location of the remnants of the renegade Legio Victorum, that most hated of their foes, deliberately provoking an immediate response from the belligerent magi of Gulgorahd who emptied their garrisons to strike at the traitors. This sudden weakness along the Loyalist lines opened by the ill-advised assault of the lords of Gulgorahd, was an opportunity the Traitors could not ignore.

Even as the Taghma of Gulgorahd began their own battle and called for his aid, the Lion was already marshalling the bulk of his Legion to attack Sheol IX, where he knew that the Night Haunter must be doing the same in preparation to take advantage of what seemed like another strategic blunder by the Gulgorahd forces. Here at last would be the decisive battle the Lion desired, arranged at the cost of the warriors of Gulgorahd, who would be expended in a futile assault on the renegade elements of the Legio Victorum in exchange for the chance to cripple the Night Lords.

Due to the nature of his new weapon, the Lion could not resort to more traditional naval tactics; there would be no advance squadrons to scout their approach and no slow consolidation of disparate armadas at the edge of the system. Instead, the gathered might of the Dark Angels, some 300 capital class ships and twice that of strike craft and smaller ships, appeared less than one AU from the outer planets of the Sheol system, drawn up in tight formation around the ancient battleship *Invincible Reason*. The Night Lords fleet, perhaps 200 capital ships and three times that of lighter torpedo boats and hunter-killer frigates, was caught completely unprepared, with many of its ships still at anchor in orbital stations above Sheol IX and the vast majority of its warriors on the planet's surface awaiting embarkation. Those squadrons ready for action moved to oppose the lead elements of the Dark Angels fleet, but could do little more than delay the massed heavy cruisers of the First Legion. A dozen Night Lords ships of the line were destroyed in the opening moments of the attack, but the precious few minutes they bought for their kin allowed the rest of their fleet to prepare. Some moved to form a cohesive defence, others tried in vain to shuttle the troops trapped on Sheol IX, including the Primarch Konrad Curze himself, to the relative safety of orbit and a few turned tail and slipped into the Warp.

The Dark Angels advanced, their ships so numerous that, from the surface of Sheol IX, they blocked out the light of the stars, and those Night Lords that remained were given little choice but to stand against the black-hulled tide that descended upon them. Here was the climactic battle they had sought, the apex of the long crusade in which they had fought and the final dispensation of justice for those that had foresworn their oaths. Yet despite this, there was no gallant charge, no moving speeches or heroic end to the long struggle for the Eastern Fringe. Instead, the Dark Angels took up firing positions and began a systematic bombardment of the Night Lords, many of their ancient relic cruisers capable of engaging the foe accurately at a far greater range than that at which their opponents could easily reply. It was a slaughter conducted with cold and dispassionate precision, with entire squadrons of Night Lords craft torn apart before they could even reply in kind to the onslaught, and the foe they had cornered refused to die an ignominious death as traitors should and responded with the determination and stubborn dignity expected of heroes of the Great Crusade.

The greater part of those ships that remained to the VIIIth Legion conducted a massed charge, while the lesser remained in orbit of Sheol IX, still struggling to bring the warriors of the Legion aboard. The sleek attack cruisers of the Night Lords stormed forwards, those in the lead taking horrific damage from the accurate Dark Angels fire, acting as a shield for those behind them to reach firing range. Splitting like a shoal of deadly and ravenous aquatic predators, the Night Lords divided into a dozen smaller formations and struck the Dark Angels line as they unleashed a furious close range storm of fire. The Dark Angels lines split, with a number of their ships aflame and listing out of formation, but did not break and the Night Lords ships threw themselves at the openings they had forced, leaving just as many of their own craft as broken hulks in the attempt. Of the 100 or more capital craft that had gone forth to give battle, barely 50 survived to breach the lines of the First Legion fleet, with many of their number having been purposefully crippled and left helpless in the void and then boarded by the Lion's warriors to be taken as prizes for the ongoing war. The survivors did not turn for a second assault or to save their wounded brethren, instead making best speed for the outskirts of the system and the safety of deep space, unwilling to allow the Dark Angels a comprehensive slaughter, for in their survival there was to be found a bitter victory.

The First Legion fleet did not pursue, instead choosing to close on those ships that still lurked in orbit of Sheol IX, having chosen to save the Night Lords as a combat force. With deliberate malice, the Dark Angels encircled Sheol IX, a small and otherwise insignificant world, and began to dismember the Night Lords that had bravely elected to remain and attempt to rescue their stranded brethren on the surface below. The main force of the Dark Angels fleet concentrated on the lead ships of the enemies' defence: the hulking Gloriana class battleship *Nightfall* that was Curze's flagship and the heavy cruisers *Shroud of Eventide* and *Feral Heart* that made a desperate attempt to shield the flagship, taking almost as much damage as they inflicted in their eagerness to end the Night Haunter. Curze, however, was not aboard the *Nightfall*, but on the surface, a fact that was revealed only as the Dark Angels began to land their own troops, seeking to end the Night Lords in detail, both in orbit and on the ground. The battle for Sheol IX quickly fell into madness and chaos, with both armies hard-pressed to follow the events in detail and chained to the small battles they found themselves caught in.

Across orbital space, the ships of the two fleets began to intermingle, caught in desperate duels and brutal boarding actions while broken hulks and the detonations of the dying proved as deadly as live foes, while the landing craft and shuttles of the Night Lords fought a separate battle to bring their troops to those few ships still capable of taking them aboard as the Dark Angels interceptors and frigates hunted them without mercy. Below, on the barren grey rock of Sheol IX, the Night Lords struggled to hold the line around the few fortified stations where they could safely embark, some detachments conducting raids against the First Legion's own landing points and others fought to destroy their own hidden armoury-vaults before the First Legion captured the heavy armour and equipment that could not be evacuated. The Night Hunter prowled the battlefield, killing in a wild frenzy and screaming for his brother to face him, leaving his Legion leaderless and divided in the face of the First Legion's onslaught.

For two long hours, the Night Lords held their ground, both in orbit and on the surface, keeping the overwhelming numbers of the Dark Angels at bay with sheer bloody spite and a tally of fallen warriors and destroyed ships that beggared belief. In orbit the number of operational Night Lords ships was outnumbered by floating hulks of the dead and crippled, while on the surface there was no company or detachment that had not suffered debilitating casualties. In the space of this one short battle, the Dark Angels had destroyed a quarter of the VIIIth Legion and threatened to further bloody them with each moment that passed. Here, at the apex of the Thramas Crusade, the Lion and the Night Hunter met once again in mortal combat, one seeking a death and the other a vindication. Their clash would be brief but vicious, no honourable duel but a spiteful brawl that would leave the Night

Hunter broken and bleeding. The Lion would have finished his fallen brother, his ire raised by the destruction he had been forced to unleash upon the Eastern Fringe, had the captains of the Night Lords not committed the last of their reserves to hold him back. A full company of the Night Lords sacrificed themselves to cover those warriors that dragged the comatose Night Hunter to the last of the Stormbirds, giving their lives to thwart the Lion's revenge.

The *Nightfall* and its companions remained pinned in orbit while the Night Hunter escaped aboard the *Excoriator*. Battered by the unceasing assault of the Dark Angels' ships that surrounded them, the *Nightfall* was infested with boarding pods and brutally efficient cadres of Firewing saboteurs. Even with their Primarch saved, though his injuries might yet prove fatal, the Night Lords would have been doomed but for the destruction of the *Feral Heart*. The badly damaged assault cruiser, only the bridge still under the control of the Night Lords and with Firewing veterans cutting through the last bulkheads, detonated its warp core rather than allow the ship to be captured. The dying ship tore apart realspace over a vast area, annihilating those ships caught within the event horizon and carving chunks from the flanks of those on its edge, blasting an opening in the closing net of the Dark Angels fleet. The *Nightfall* powered into the gap, using its sheer bulk to

smash aside the cruiser *Unyielding Duty* and the remaining ships of the fleet followed. The Night Lords cruisers *Absolute* and *Crown of Ashes*, last in the fleeing fleet, turned at bay to buy their brothers time to get clear of the Dark Angels, overloading their power relays to deliver salvo after salvo of fire as the Dark Angels cut them to pieces. The surviving Night Lords did not wait to reach the outer extents of the system and the Mandeville point, but instead activated their warp drives just outside of Sheol IX's weak gravitic pull. Three more ships died there as their warp drives suffered catastrophic failures, the result of such a desperate gambit, and the rest fell into the dubious safety of the Warp, the Dark Angels remaining on-station over Sheol IX to eradicate those left behind. The battle for the Sheol system was over, and on the surface of its ninth planet, amid the ashes of the latest in so many worlds broken by his hands, the Lion brooded over the words of Konrad Curze:

"We are savage weapons, one and all, too dangerous to be wielded without cost. That is all history will see of us. Even you Lion. Even you."





THE HEAVY TOLL OF VICTORY

*'What prospers the Imperium if we cut out its beating heart in order to claim the ephemeral blessings of victory in war?
I fear that what the Night Haunter has unleashed will not end with his defeat, but haunt us to our graves and beyond.'*

Captain-general Morhde of the Thramassi Nightwatch

A Legion Rent Asunder

Written in the vast clouds of debris that spun in orbit of Sheol IX and with the drifts of corpses on its surface was the final end of the Thramas Crusade. More than three years of blood and death had brought both Loyalist and Traitor to this dark place. There was no victory parade or laurels granted to its heroes, only the empty places in their ranks. For the Night Lords, it seemed the death knell of their Legion, for near a quarter of those that had survived the war to that point now lay dead on the surface of Sheol IX and the once-great fleet of the VIIIth Legion was reduced to a shadow of its former self. The Night Hunter stood as the very emblem of his Legion, for though he lived, his wounds were so grave that all who beheld him spoke of him as dead. One half of his shattered Legion feared he would never rise again, and the other half, blaming his mania for their own humiliation, hoped that this was true. In the aftermath of Sheol, little remained of the once-proud VIIIth Legion that would be recognised by those that had known them in the long-passed days of the Unification Wars.

In imitation of their Primarch, the Night Lords Legion was wounded unto death, and its warriors stood on the very edge of their own civil war. Without the threat of the Night Hunter's wrath there seemed little reason to many of the warlords within the Legion for them to continue Horus' war when they could instead see to their own amusement. Had this been left to fester, it is likely that the Night Lords would have ceased to exist as a cohesive army, bound to disintegrate into roving warbands of pirates and reavers, instead it would be bled of its sickness. Sevatar and the Atramentar brought death to their own, fighting a short and brutal war to restore a sense of unity and purpose to the broken Legion. Taking power and setting up a new council to lead the Legion, Sevatar let those who could not serve in his new Night Lords slip into the shadows of the Thramas sector while he gathered the last survivors to him at the small and insignificant star of Qetesh.

Here, the Night Lords would meet with the final humiliation of their long battle with the Dark Angels. Having gathered the survivors of the fleet, calling ships from the rally points at Yrrkesh, Taur and other stars, the Night Lords had thought to gain a brief respite, but this was not to be. Even as the Night Lords prepared to depart the Eastern Fringe, the Dark Angels fell upon them once more. This could not be called a battle, for the First Legion outnumbered

their prey so greatly and had surprised them so completely that it was not a matter of whether they would claim victory, but rather one of how many Traitor ships would be able to escape the slaughter. Once again, the deciding factor would be the unpredictable actions of Konrad Curze, who, awakening from his torpor aboard the *Excoriator* as the Night Lords fought to escape, ordered a final boarding assault upon the Dark Angels' flagship. It was a futile and doomed effort, the manifestation of the Night Hunter's bitter and suicidal spite, and it would cost his Legion dearly. Of the more than 100,000 warriors of the VIIIth Legion that had entered the conflict, less than 60,000 would escape the ambush at Sheol IX, with the Night Hunter himself counted amongst those lost, last seen battling the Lion aboard the *Invincible Reason* alongside Sevatar and the Atramentar. It was the end of the VIIIth Legion, the last gasp of the warriors that had won the Great Crusade only to be cut loose from the constraints of its strictures, and the beginning of something far darker.

A Resolve Tarnished

Even for the Legion that history records as the victor, the savour of their triumph was ashen and the laurels they wore fashioned of the scorched bones of empire. Though the Dark Angels had taken only a fraction of the losses inflicted upon the Night Lords, with no more than 10,000 of its warriors slain in combat, they had expended a different collateral in order to secure the final destruction of their foe. The resolve of the First Legion and its Primarch had been tested, their desire for victory matched against their willingness to tear down the Imperium to grasp it. It was a test that Lion El'Jonson had stood many times in the past, the death of a world considered a small cost to pay for the future of the Imperium entire, but this war would be different. It would demand sacrifice on a scale that dwarfed even that of the Great Crusade, with hundreds of worlds either left to burn so that battles elsewhere might be won, or entire populations put to the sword so that they could not be pressed to the service of the Traitor. Had it been any other than the Lion they might have wavered. Sanguinius would have deplored the cost in innocent lives and Guilliman would have abhorred the ruin of productive worlds, but Lion El'Jonson had long since hardened his heart to such trials.

There was but a single tiny chink in the armour that the Lion had forged around his soul, a sole weakness that pained him greatly in the final days of the Thramas

campaign. It was a wound inflicted by the Night Hunter, not a wound carved in his flesh, for the Primarchs had ever been quick to heal from even the most grievous wounds, but a darkness on his heart. Konrad Curze's words haunted him, "*Even you Lion, even you*". He did not care that others might hold him in contempt for his choices, for he believed that history would redeem him, but that his methods made him no different from Curze, from the Night Hunter, was a blade held against his heart. All of the sacrifices that had been made to build the Imperium and preserve the Emperor's dream of unity were his pride, his duty, paid for with his own blood and that of his sons. That they would be seen as equal to the butchery perpetrated by brute-killers like Curze or Angron set him closer to anger, to blind rage, than any other insult or wound had ever done. The Lion wondered whether, in the final days of war in the Eastern Fringe, he had acted from cruel necessity or at the impulse of his own hatred for Curze.

For Thramas and its broken worlds he could do nothing, remorse of any kind was akin to foolishness to the Lion. It had been ruined in the cause of the Imperium, yet one more sacrifice offered up for a future the Emperor had promised to His sons, and it was of no further value in the war against Horus. So the Lion left, neither in triumph nor defeat, but with a fragile sense of pride that once again the First Legion had stormed into the jaws of hell and emerged bloodied but unbroken. If this rebellion was to be the final test of his resolve he would meet it head-on, he would prove himself better than those of his brothers that had fallen to their own selfish needs and hatreds. By his hand would the Imperium be saved, and he would tolerate none that sought to see it ended, for the sake of his own sacrifices and the duty that had been given him by the Emperor Himself. From broken Thramas the Lion turned his ships, not towards distant Terra, still shrouded in warp storms, but towards Ultramar and his brother Guilliman, for dire rumours had reached him from Tigrus. They spoke of destruction and death, of the treachery of the World Eaters and Word Bearers, and of a new banner raised amongst the ruins of his Imperium. One rebel had already risen and would fall at the Lion's hand, and if another had dared to rise, they would meet the same fate. The Dark Angels departed Thramas in full battle order, guns readied and blades sharp; they set their courses by a new beacon and to a singular destination.

To Imperium Secundus.

HERALDRY OF THE NIGHT LORDS



These banners are typical of the later heraldry of the Night Lords, and heavily influenced by the hive gangs of Nostramo, Cairn and other benighted worlds of that distant sector. Much of the ordered heraldry of the old Terran Legion has been replaced by the more haphazard icons of individual warlords, displaying favoured trophies and sobriquets to intimidate and terrorise a foe.



This MkIII pauldron shows a traditional Nostraman command insignia. The red field indicates the owner was under official sanction.



An older example of Legion heraldry, borne by a Terran veteran of the old Legion. It features the newer icon favoured by the Night Hunter.



A MkVI pauldron from Nostramo. The insignia is that of the Grave Lords street gang, which supplied a large number of Night Lords recruits.



The Screaming Skull insignia, shown here in crimson on a MkIV pauldron, is often associated with those of the Night Lords that favoured the Warmaster.



The Cross 'o Bones that served to identify the Faceless Prince. The inscription translates roughly to 'The strong prosper, the weak suffer'.



Another depiction of the Screaming Skull. The accompanying inscription features the Nostraman runes for 'empire' and 'destroy'.



The Red Gauntlet, displayed here on a MkIII pauldron, had come to indicate a loyalty to Jago Sevatarion and the restoration of the Night Hunter.



A traditional Night Lords emblem. Likely this is intended to serve during rare Imperium parades when the more macabre battle plate would be frowned upon.



VIIITH LEGION VETERAN LEGIONARY

HEADSMAN REHK NAHMRIS, 9TH DECIMATION BRIGADE, Yaelis Expanse Campaign

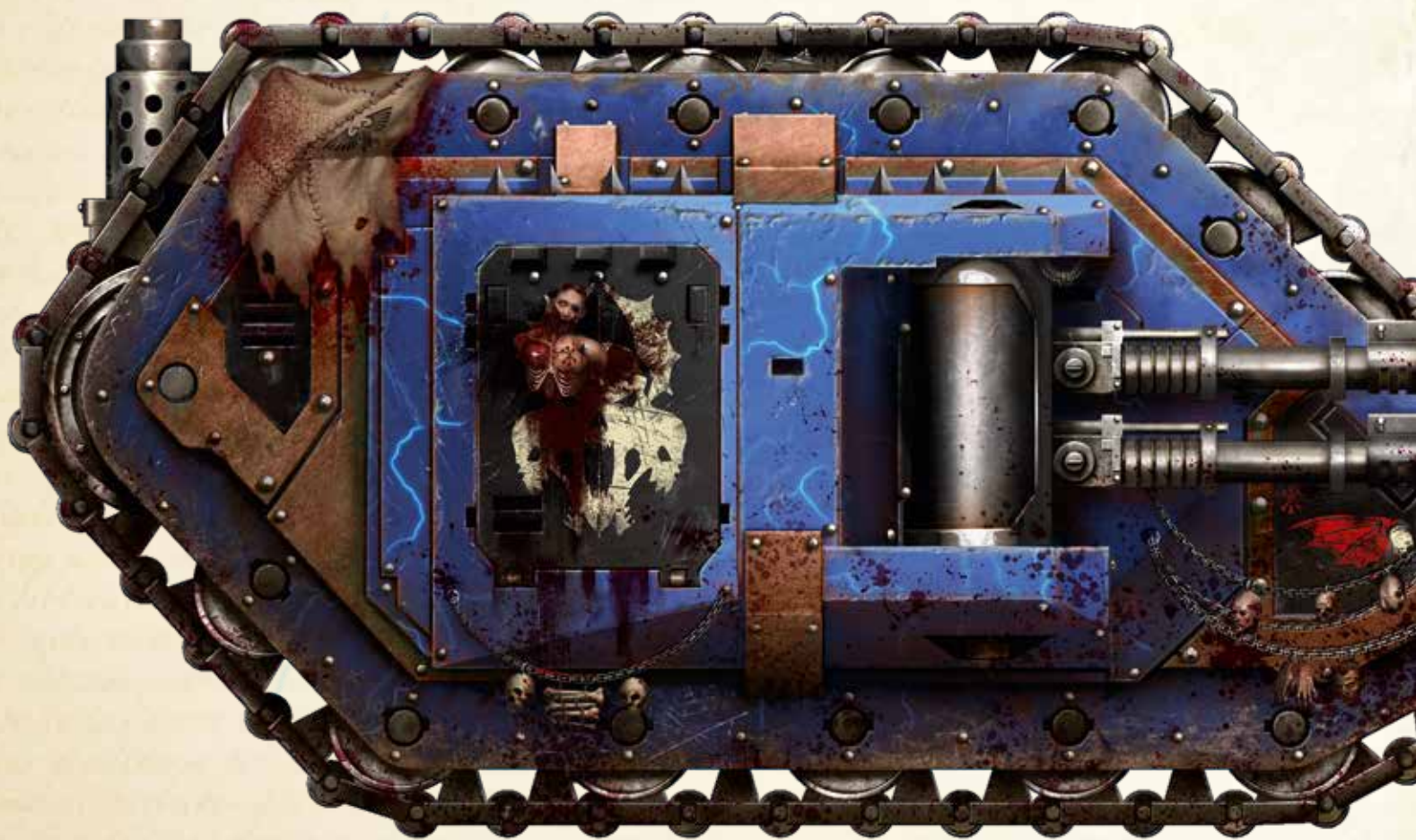
Operating as part of a deployment of three separate Chapters of the Night Lords, Headsman Nahmriss and the Assault squads assigned to his command participated in the cleansing of three worlds, a campaign lasting nearly three months. In each case they faced only light opposition, most often in the form of Solar Auxilia detachments of the Thramassi Nightwatch, and were easily able to slaughter those that openly opposed them. The majority of the campaign would be spent in the systematic and brutal annihilation of the main planetary population centres, driving the inhabitants into the wilderness to starve. Such campaigns served as an object lesson to those who would oppose the Night Haunter and were key in forcing a number of surrenders by more heavily-fortified worlds. Headsman Nahmriss himself was hailed for his zeal in such operations and would end the Thramas Crusade at the rank of Centurion thanks to his efforts.

PACIFICATION BATTALIONS

Among the Night Lords' order of battle for the Thramas Crusade were a number of divisions, innocuously named 'Pacification Battalions'. Despite the title borne by these forces, they were primarily constituted of heavy armour and shock assault infantry, most often from the infamous Terror Squads that were a unique feature of the VIIIth Legion. In action these forces were deployed to isolated Loyalist worlds with the sole goal of breaking whatever limited defences they might possess and then ravaging the planet and its population, making of them a visceral example to others of the price of defiance.

Upon arriving at its target, a Pacification Battalion first deploys its heavy armour en-masse, with most worlds targeted for attack unable to muster more than token resistance to such a hammerblow of military might. Once the defenders were broken and scattered, infantry assets and swift speeders and bikes are deployed to hunt them down, both military and civilian assets alike. Such operations are focused not on the reduction of enemy military force, but on collateral damage and a brutal culling of the population, making certain that those few who might evade their hunt would have secured little more than a slower death for themselves.

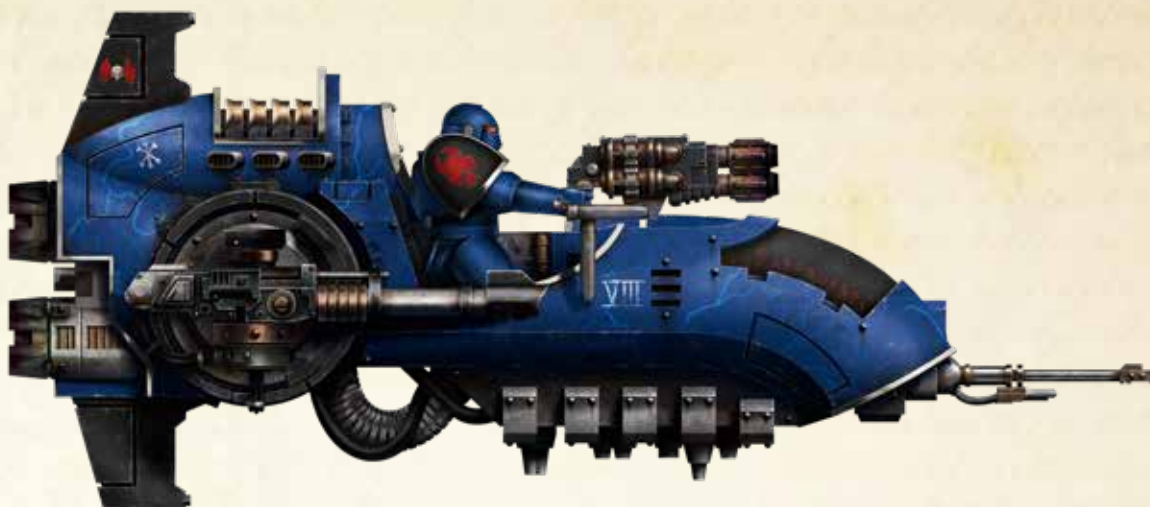
A Pacification Battalion rarely made any attempt to hold its ground, most often departing after a brief onslaught intended to inflict maximum destruction. In their wake would be left a scene of utter devastation – the desecrated corpses of the fallen and the gutted remains of cities, not merely wanton destruction, but a weapon more potent than any cannon or tank. Fear was the goal of these operations and it was such fear that tormented the Thramas sector during the long years of the Night Haunter's crusade.



NIGHT LORDS LAND RAIDER

MERCY-KILLER

Named ironically, as was the wont of the Night Lords, this vehicle is known to have participated in some 18 pacification operations, with a potential tally of kills in the thousands. Its crew were known for their propensity for using the vehicle's lascannon to collapse hab-blocks upon those civilians attempting to take shelter within or to cut apart fortifications, turning them into traps for the troops now entombed within.



NIGHT LORDS JAVELIN LAND SPEEDER

FLAY-THETA/NINE

Part of the large Land Speeder formations used by the Night Lords to harry retreating foes or to drive civilian forces into pre-arranged ambushes. Such vehicles were a favoured tool of the VIIIth Legion for their ability to engage the enemy on their own terms and withdraw before being outmanoeuvred, earning them the nickname 'Skathra Nar', a hilt-less knife from Nostramo used for sudden strikes and unexpected attacks.



VIIITH LEGION ICONOGRAPHY

Seen here on the *Mercy-killer's* rear/side embarkation port is another variation of the Screaming Skull emblem associated with the Warmaster's advocates within the Legion, though it is largely obscured by the grisly trophies secured to the hull of the Land Raider. Such gruesome decorations were far from uncommon amongst the Night Hunter's warriors.

THE BLEAK COHORT

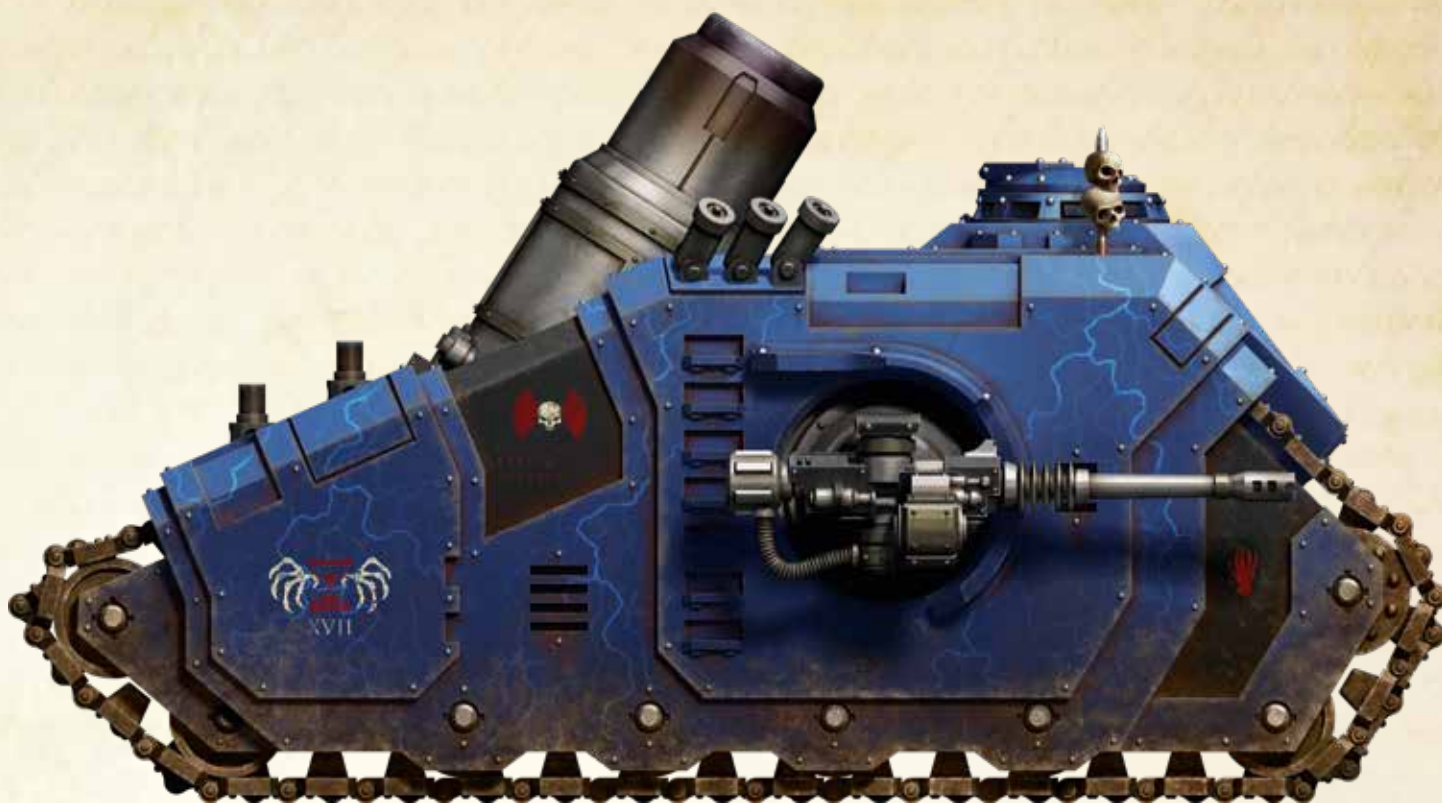
The Night Lords 17th Chapter, often known within the Legion as the Bleak Cohort, was one of the few fully-mechanised detachments of the Night Haunter's Legion. Its ranks included a large proportion of armoured vehicles, including several squadrons of Kratos heavy tanks whose design had fallen out of favour with many Legions. When the Legion went openly to war, once terror had done its job and weakened the enemy's resolve, the Bleak Cohort was often to be found in the vanguard.

In a unique variation on the Legion's philosophy, the Bleak Cohort deployed in a manner that sought to set fear in the heart of the foe. Before the onset of battle, the

full panoply of the cohort would be drawn up before the enemy, the serried ranks of its armoured vehicles an unbroken line of steel and ceramite, engines roaring loud enough to drown out all other noise. Many a foe has broken and run in the face of such an onslaught, the Bleak Cohort leading the Night Lords to many a victory. Yet during the Thramas Crusade, the 17th would face its most fearsome challenge in the Dark Angels Ironwing. On Sheol IX, the gathered might of the Bleak Cohort would be pitted against those elements of the Ironwing assembled from the host of the First Legion that assaulted that world, a battle that saw several hundred armoured vehicles thrown against each other as the Bleak Cohort strove to hold the Dark Angels at bay while their

brethren evacuated. Despite their pride and long-honed skill, the Bleak Cohort found themselves put to shame by the deft tactics and relic war machines of the Ironwing, forced to commit their heaviest and most treasured vehicles to desperate ambushes and holding actions to keep from being overrun. Indeed, such was the carnage they endured that of the eight super-heavy vehicles attached to the Bleak Cohort, only two would survive the battle and be successfully evacuated, and both of those had sustained such severe damage that neither would be combat ready for several months after the fighting.

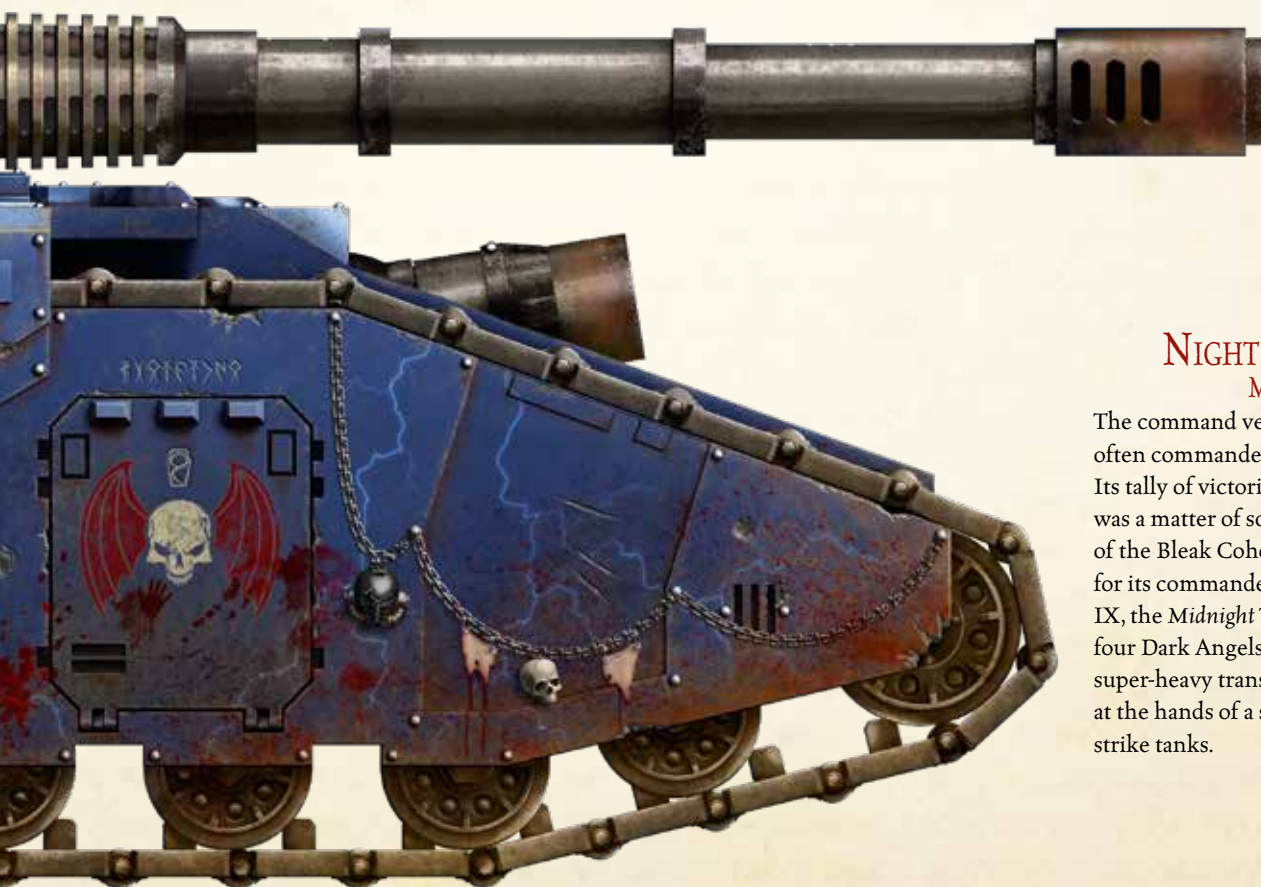




NIGHT LORDS BOMBARD

VANGUARD

Attached to the 17th Chapter, this is a rare example of an artillery vehicle in the Night Lords' service. The Night Lords showed little favour to artillery and the more static tactics that required its massed deployment. The Bombard, with its slow speed and blunt aspect, was most often assigned rear echelon roles, typically used to eradicate enemy positions that had been isolated and bypassed by the Night Lords frontlines.



NIGHT LORDS FELLBLADE

MIDNIGHT TERMINUS

The command vehicle of the 17th Chapter, and often commanded by Praetor Cynvaer in person. Its tally of victories during the Great Crusade was a matter of some pride amongst the warriors of the Bleak Cohort, and earned much honour for its commander. During the fighting on Sheol IX, the *Midnight Terminus* would score kills on four Dark Angels vehicles, including a Mastodon super-heavy transport, before its destruction at the hands of a squadron of Firewing Sabre strike tanks.

NIGHT LORDS VETERAN LEGIONARY

LEGIONARY ENDROS SHEK

THRAMAS CRUSADE

9TH TERROR COMPANY, 18TH CHAPTER

One of many Night Lords warriors but recently raised to the Legion from the ruined world of Nostramo, Shek is typical of that malicious breed. Raised among the street gangs of Nostramo, he and his brethren paid more heed to the barbaric honour codes that had governed those fractious clans than to the dictates of the *Principia Bellicosa*, the doctrines of war that were the basis of the old Legiones Astartes. By the beginning of the Thramas Crusade, the 18th Chapter of the Night Lords had become little more than a warped mirror of Nostramo's dark side, more piratical marauders than soldiers of the Imperial Truth and little given to the discipline that had once characterised their breed.

During the Thramas Crusade, the 18th Chapter was one of many involved in the reduction of morale in the Thramas sector, striking at isolated and vulnerable targets on Loyalist worlds with the utmost ferocity. Such raiding forces left behind little but gruesome trophies of their conquests, seeking to break the foe's will to fight and spread fear throughout the Loyalist defenders of the sector. The 18th Chapter would see some early success but falter when confronted by elements of the Dark Angels during later battles, the First Legion's fury stoked by the tales of the atrocities committed by the Night Lords.



The Bloody Hand was the unofficial emblem of the Night Lords terror battalions.



The standard heraldry in use by the Night Lords at the time of the Thramas Crusade.



NIGHT LORDS CONTEMPTOR DREADNOUGHT

HARBINGER MALTHAX THULE, DREADNOUGHT OF THE 8TH CHAPTER

As a Terran veteran of the old VIIIth Legion, Harbinger Thule was viewed with a mix of wary respect and amused disdain by his Nostraman cohorts. Prone to falling into a fugue where visions of past battles and glories replaced the gore and slaughter of the Night Lords battles in the Thramas sector, the warrior within the Dreadnought found himself branded with the mark of the outcast, the Red Gauntlet. The Night Haunter himself held the veterans of his father's wars, entombed now in coffins of ceramite, as distasteful reminders of a past he chose to shun and often assigned them to the most gruelling battlefields and deadly campaigns. Harbinger Thule would find the end of his long campaign at Sheol IX, believing himself once more at the side of the Emperor and His hosts, and bellowing the old warcries of Unity even as the Dark Angels cut him apart.

